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Sue Ann Says: Heart & Happiness

Eleanor Roosevelt said, *"Happiness is not a goal...it's a by-product of a life well lived."* Are you ready to get heart healthy and happy this summer? To reach that emotional state of joy and happiness, you need to take measures and choose to have a healthy lifestyle. By investing in modest lifestyle changes you can cut your risk of coronary heart disease. Let's examine ways that you can keep your heart healthy consequently increasing your own state of happiness.

Summertime Foods Strengthen the Heart

Let's imagine you are at the grocery store. Which aisle do you head to first? Are you stocking up on cookies, ice cream and chips? If so, slide on over to the vegetable and fruit aisles. Nothing tastes better on a hot summer day than eating some succulent berries or a chilled bowl of melon. A diced cup of cantaloupe averages around 53 calories and holds several antioxidants including choline, beta-carotene and fiber.

Now scan the vegetable aisle for juicy red tomatoes, green and yellow peppers, and fresh snap peas and whip up a delightful salad. Throw various veggies on the grill to eat with a chicken breast. Vegetables can help you feel full longer, are lower in calories than an ice cream sundae, which can help you cut calories. Losing excess weight is one of the best ways to protect your heart.

Snacking on food high in trans-fats is definitely unhealthy for your heart and can elevate cholesterol. Ditch French fries, processed frostings, pie crusts, creamy frozen drinks and crackers. Nibble instead on fresh apple slices, raw carrots and cucumber slices.

Alter your diet to include healthier fats by using unsaturated fats in your cooking. Add a handful of walnuts to a salad, eat salmon and cook in olive or canola oil. Seek out Monounsaturated fats, also called MUFAs, for daily meals and snacks. Studies show that eating foods rich in monounsaturated fats (MUFAs) improves blood cholesterol levels, which can decrease your risk of heart disease. Examples of MUFAs include almonds, macadamia, pecans, cashews, hazel nuts, Brazil nuts, pistachios, avocados, and dark chocolate.

Enjoy the Outdoors to Keep Your Heart Happy and Healthy

I know you have heard my pitch, "Get up and get moving!" The Surgeon General recommends adults engage in moderate intensity exercise for 2 hours and 30 minutes every week. Physical inactivity leads to obesity which can lead to cardiovascular disease.

If you cannot exercise alone, find a neighbor or a friend who will join you. Challenge yourself to try a new activity. How about trying Pickle Ball? This fun game is a cross between tennis, badminton and ping pong. Numerous cities in Wisconsin now have Pickle Ball courts where you can play for a nominal fee like \$3.00 to \$4.00. (<http://www.pickleballwi.com/play/>) Instead of sitting in the chair reading all weekend, get a book on tape and listen while you walk around the town. If you cannot swim laps for an hour, just climb into your area pool and walk. The water is joint friendly but does add resistance that will help tone your muscles. This resistance also burns more calories than it does if you are walking on dry land.

Take Steps to Quit Smoking

To put it plainly, smoking damages your heart. If you smoke, are inactive and have high cholesterol, the chances of you having heart disease increases. The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute states "Smoking is a major risk factor for peripheral arterial disease (P.A.D.). P.A.D. is a condition in which plaque builds up in the arteries that carry blood to the head, organs, and limbs. People who have P.A.D. are at increased risk for heart disease, heart attack, and stroke." (<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/smo>)

Quitting is not an easy process. Turn to trusted friends and family to give you support. Talk to your health professional to gain guidance on quitting and obtain information about over the counter products which could curb cravings.

Monitor Your Blood Pressure

Become happy and heart healthy by knowing your blood pressure numbers and monitoring them. Your doctor will record your blood pressure each time you are at the clinic for a visit. A normal blood pressure is 120/80 mmHg. Have a heart to heart with your doctor and find ways you can lower your blood pressure by making healthy lifestyle choices. If you take blood pressure medication, do not stop taking it without consulting your doctor!

Get Heart Healthy by Being Optimistic

Dr. Laura Kubzansky, a professor of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health completed a 20 year study in 2007 on emotional vitality and the heart. Of the 6000 adults in her study, the ones that had a high sense of enthusiasm, hopefulness and the ability to face life's stresses had a reduced risk of coronary heart disease.

In a similar study, Karina Davidson, director of Columbia's Center for Behavioral Cardiovascular Health, found that the happier someone was the less likely he or she was to develop heart disease. For the study, Davidson's team followed 1,739 men and women for 10 years. In fact, for every point on a five-point scale that measured positive affect, the risk of heart disease dropped 22 percent. (<http://www.neocs.org/news/happiness-your-heart/>)

Because it all begins with a healthy woman...

Sue Ann Thompson is founder and president of the Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation (WWHF), a statewide non-profit organization whose mission is to help Wisconsin women and their families reach their healthiest potential. WWHF provides programs and conducts forums that focus on education, prevention, and early detection; connects individuals to health resources; produces and distributes the most up-to-date health education and resource materials; and, awards grants and scholarships to women health researchers and related community non-profits. To learn more, visit wwhf.org or call 1-800-448-5148.