

My Heart says...

With Valentine's Day being celebrated in February, we will see heart candy, red and pink hearts on cards and hearts being used as decorations as the heart is often the symbol of "Love". If you pay attention to the media or popular culture, you will notice that the heart seems to be everywhere as there are many, many references to the heart in movies, literature, advertising, television and music. Our language is peppered with references to the heart..."Have a heart", "Change of heart", "To know something by heart", "Eat your heart out", and "Broken heart" are just a few common examples. Certainly no other organ in our body elicits these kinds of relationships, responses or attention.

We cannot live without our heart and everyone knows it is a vital organ. However, when you get right down to it, the heart is just a fist-sized pump that usually weighs less than one pound. A healthy heart beats steadily and rhythmically at a rate of about 60 to 100 beats per minute (the adult average is 72 when at rest) pumping about 1.3 gallons of blood per minute. This means that by the time someone is 70 years old their heart will likely have pumped about 48 million gallons and exceeded 2.5 billion heart beats! Arteries are the blood vessels that carry blood with oxygen and nutrients to all parts of the body. Veins are the blood vessels that carry blood depleted of oxygen and nutrients back to the heart and lungs. Blood brings oxygen and nutrients to the organs and tissues and picks up waste from the body's cells. Waste products are removed as they filter through the kidneys, liver and lungs.

Before 1900, very few people died of heart disease. Since then, heart disease has become a major health issue in the United States. The age of technology has made life easier and therefore made us more prone to heart problems. Before the industrial revolution, most people made their living through some form of manual labor and walking was the major mode of transportation. Accompanying the decline in physical activity came changes to the American diet...fried and processed foods and the advent of "fast food". The combination of a sedentary lifestyle and a rich diet led to an increase in clogged blood vessels, heart attacks, and strokes. The rate of heart disease increased so sharply between 1940 and 1970 that the World Health Organization called it the world's most serious epidemic.

Today, heart disease is the number one cause of death in men and women, greater than the next five causes of death combined. Almost 2,000 Americans die of heart disease each day...that is one death every 44 seconds. According to recent estimates of the American Heart Association (AHA), over 64 million Americans have one or more forms of cardiovascular disease. Coronary artery disease (CAD) is the most common form as more than a third of adult Americans will develop CAD during their lifetime. Women are increasingly becoming the greater percentage of heart disease sufferers.

When most of us think of heart problems or medical emergencies we think first of "a heart attack". Although a heart attack is sudden, the causes of most heart attacks are not as usually years of unhealthy heart habits unexpectedly catch up with you. A diseased heart is like a ticking time bomb. Medically, a heart attack usually occurs when the supply of blood to the heart muscle is reduced or stopped. The most common warning signs are:

- Uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing, or pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes or goes away but comes back again
- Pain that may spread to the shoulders, neck, or arms
- Related symptoms such as lightheadedness, sweating, nausea, or shortness of breath

These signs are common but some heart attacks may have different sensations. What is most critical is that you call an emergency service or get to the nearest hospital as time is very, very important.

Fortunately there are ways to significantly lower your chances of developing heart disease and in many instances reverse the effects of a current heart condition. Essentially improving your heart health boils down to three key areas: following a heart healthy diet, exercising regularly, and leading a healthy lifestyle. You should also be very knowledgeable about and aim for the following AHA recommended healthy numbers:

Measurement/Lab Test Category	Key number to aim for
Blood Pressure	120/80 mm HG or less
LDL Cholesterol	Below 100 mg/dL
HDL Cholesterol	Above 50 mg/dL
Total Cholesterol	Below 200 mg/dL
Triglycerides	Below 150 mg/dL
Blood sugar (fasting glucose)	Up to 100 mg/dL

Would you like to learn more about your heart? The Delta College *50+...Just Like Gold Program* offers monthly "Bits and Bites" sessions (the format is a bit of information along with a bite to eat) that introduce you to new topics, new options and new information. On Friday, February 18, 2011 the topic will be all about our HEART with guest presenter Debbie Best, RN of Covenant Cardiovascular Services. Advance registration is requested and to do so you may call (989) 686-9444.

Don't put off your journey to a healthier heart. Start today by eating healthier including more fruits and vegetables, walking and sleeping more, taking off some weight, reducing stress, making new friends, limiting alcohol, stopping smoking, laughing and learning more about your heart.

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