AMERICAN HEART MONTH—FIGHT AGAINST HEART DISEASE

February is not only celebrated as a month of love and romance, it is also recognized as American Heart Month. February is dedicated to raising awareness about the dangers of heart disease and promoting heart health. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States (U.S.). According to the American Heart Association (AHA), 1 in 4 deaths are caused by heart disease. That is more than 600,000 Americans who die from heart disease each year. The good news is that heart disease can often be prevented and controlled through healthy lifestyle choices.

Importance of the Heart

The heart is an organ that is essential for living. It is a muscle about the size of a fist that constantly pumps blood to all parts of the body. According to the AHA, the average heart beats 100,000 times and pumps about 2,000 gallons of blood each day. We depend on the heart to transport oxygen and other nutrients to our cells and other necessary organs. Such organs include the brain, kidneys, lungs, and liver. The role that the heart plays is vital for the body to function. Therefore, it is very crucial to maintain a strong and healthy heart.

Heart Disease

Heart disease, or cardiovascular disease, describes a broad range of medical conditions that affect the heart and blood vessels. Coronary artery disease is the most common type of heart disease, and is a result of fatty deposits clogging the arteries in the body. It can even lead to heart attacks, which according to the AHA, occurs in someone in the U.S. every 43 seconds. Other conditions include hypertensive heart disease, stroke, or chest pain (angina). Many cases of heart disease are preventable. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), at least 200,000 deaths from heart disease or stroke each year are preventable. However, many people who are at high risk for heart attack or stroke do not even know it. That is why it is important to be knowledgeable about heart health.

Risk Factors

Assessing your risk factors can help you become more aware of your own personal risk for heart disease. The following conditions or habits can make a person more likely to develop heart disease. For more information, or to discuss your risk factors, talk with your health care provider.

- Uncontrolled high blood pressure
- High LDL, or "bad cholesterol"
- Smoking or tobacco use
- Diabetes or pre-diabetes
- Being overweight or obese
- Physical inactivity or lack of exercise
- Family history of heart disease
- Unhealthy diet
- Excessive alcohol consumption

Prevention

By adopting healthy habits, we can reduce our chances for developing heart disease. Many factors contributing to heart disease are controllable. Below is a list of ways you can help maintain a healthy heart. Talk to your doctor for additional ways to help lower your risk.

- Quit smoking
- Control other health conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or high cholesterol
- Exercise regularly (at least 150 minutes per week of moderate intensity exercise)
- Maintain a healthy weight (BMI 18.5 to 24.9)
- Eat a nutritious diet (low in salt and saturated fat, but high in fiber, whole grains, and vegetables)
- Limit alcohol intake to ≤ 1 drink per day for women and ≤ 2 drinks per day for men

Health Screening

Another great way to become more informed about your heart health is to get screened by a health care professional. Many doctors recommend at least an annual visit to a physician's office. This includes checking of blood pressure, blood cholesterol, blood sugar levels, height, and weight. Your doctor may also ask you about other lifestyle habits such as cigarette smoking, exercise routine, and diet regimen. It is also important to tell your health care professional if you have a family history of heart disease or stroke. For more information, talk to your health care provider.

Celebrate February, American Heart Month.
Love with your heart, and love your heart!