

Love Your Heart

February is American Heart Month, the perfect opportunity to learn more about keeping your heart in good health.

The heart is a muscle that pumps blood through your body. But as you age, so does your heart. Normal aging causes your heart and blood vessels to stiffen, which can lead to a variety of conditions known as heart disease. These include conditions such as heart failure, coronary artery disease (a narrowing or blockage of the arteries), and atrial fibrillation (irregular, rapid heart rate).

Fortunately, there are steps you can take to keep your heart as healthy as possible and to reduce your risk of heart disease, including:

- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Obesity is a major risk factor for heart disease. Even being slightly overweight (10-20 pounds for a person of average height) increases your risk.
- **Eat a heart-healthy diet.** Fruits and vegetables are rich in vitamins, minerals and fiber, which can help control weight and blood pressure. Oily fish like salmon, trout and herring contain heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Choose lean meats and poultry without skin, and cook them without added saturated and trans fat. Avoid sugar.
- **Read food labels.** Food choices greatly impact your chance of developing heart disease. When shopping, take time to read the labels and look for foods that are low in sodium, cholesterol, saturated fat, and trans fat. When reading the ingredients remember that ingredients are listed from high to low. The higher it is on the list, the more that ingredient is in the food. If sugar is listed first, it means the food has mostly sugar.
- **Schedule time for exercise.** A lack of physical activity is a major risk factor for heart disease. Not only does exercise make your heart stronger and work more efficiently, it helps burn calories. Healthy adults should be getting at least 30 minutes of exercise five days a week. As a member of Care N' Care, you have the

SilverSneakers fitness program available to you at no additional cost. Visit silversneakers.com or call your Customer Experience Team to find a participating location near you and join a group of like-minded people focused on maintaining good health and independence.

- **Stop smoking.** Cigarette smokers are two to three times more likely to die from coronary heart disease than nonsmokers. Smoking increases blood pressure, decreases exercise tolerance and “good” cholesterol, and increases the tendency for blood to clot.
- **Take prescribed medication.** It is vitally important that you take any medication your doctor has prescribed for a heart condition. This includes blood pressure medication.
- **Learn the signs of a heart attack.** Heart attacks can come on suddenly and intensely, but can also start slowly with just mild pain or discomfort. Early signs are often dismissed because people don't realize what is happening to them. Call 9-1-1 if you experience chest discomfort (may feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain), discomfort in other areas of the upper body (one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach), shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort (may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness; and women may also experience nausea or vomiting). Even if you're not sure, have it checked out. Fast treatment can make a life-saving difference.

If you've already been diagnosed with heart disease, lifestyle changes can improve the quality and length of your life. Change is never easy, but small adjustments to your daily activities can have a positive impact on your health. If you have any questions or concerns about your heart health, talk to your doctor.