



February 2010 DG Counseling, Inc. Newsletter: Taking Care of Your Heart By Matt Rome

February has made its arrival everyone! And this means a few things. For all of you wishful thinkers out there (me included), it most likely means that winter's worst is behind us and spring time is just around the corner. Let's all hope that Punxsutawney Phil - Pennsylvania's most celebrated groundhog resident – fails to see its shadow so we can be rid of the winter doldrums and usher in the freshness of spring! Perhaps February is most well-known for Valentine's Day – a holiday that many seem to either love or hate. For many folks who have a significant other present in their life, this particular holiday can be a very joyous occasion – one that can allow couples to express their appreciation for one another in a romantic and loving way. Make no mistake, those individuals who fancy themselves as “hopeless romantics” often go all-out for that special someone in their life. Candle-lit dinners, lights turned down low, and Luther Vandross playing on the stereo does not sound like much of a stretch for someone eager to celebrate this holiday of love with their valentine. For some, however, this holiday's only use is to pour an extra helping of salt into the proverbial wound, especially those who are in the process of getting over a recent breakup. And then there are other people who simply write Valentine's Day off as a “Hallmark Holiday” – a holiday in which the only purpose is to turn a profit for card and candy companies. Any way you slice it, Valentine's Day helps makes February a month in which an extra emphasis is placed on the “L” word – LOVE. Now, I could certainly take this newsletter in the direction of that very topic. In fact, many readers would

expect nothing less. However, I am going to throw you guys a bit of a curveball here and put the white-hot spotlight on another topic that relates to Valentine's Day (somewhat). Since Valentine's Day concerns matters of the heart, I figured it would be an opportune time to discuss heart health. Here are some helpful ways we can all take better care of our ticker. Perhaps this topic will also help renew your new year's resolution commitments as well, especially if they had anything at all to do with healthy lifestyle changes. Get ready! Get set! Here we go!



First of all, an active lifestyle – one that incorporates ample durations of physical fitness on a daily and weekly basis - may be the most important way to keep our hearts young and fit. According to the American Heart Association, regular physical exercise helps do the following: lower blood pressure, increase HDL cholesterol (the good kind of cholesterol) in your blood, control blood sugar by improving how your body uses insulin, reduce feelings of stress, control body weight and make you feel good about yourself by increasing the release of good hormones, such as endorphins, in your body. You might find yourself posing the following inquiry: So what exactly constitutes so-called exercise? Well, reverting back to the most current American Heart Association guidelines as my primary reference, exercise or physical activity is anything that makes you move your body and burns calories, such as climbing stairs or playing sports. Aerobic exercises (a genre of exercise that intends to improve the efficiency of the cardiovascular system in absorbing and transporting oxygen) benefit your heart, such as walking, jogging, swimming or biking. Strength and stretching exercises are best for overall stamina and flexibility, while strength training and stretching exercises are best for overall stamina and

flexibility. Many fitness aficionados recommend a steady combination of both in order to keep your muscular and respiratory systems functioning at optimal levels. Do not by any means fool yourselves into thinking that you need to become an all-world tri-athlete in order to better your heart health though. The Harvard Medical School and the American Heart Association both recommend that people of average health engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week or at least 75 minutes of vigorous exercise per week in 15-30 minute intervals. And if you absolutely cannot stand to venture out to the gym to work up a sweat, one must never underestimate the power of walking, which is something you can literally do just about anywhere! The simplest, most positive change you can make to effectively improve your heart health is to start walking. It's enjoyable, free, easy, social and great exercise! Often times, walking does not even feel like so-called strenuous exercise. For instance, when one takes a walk of a couple of miles in a forest preserve or a nature walk type of setting, that person is often too preoccupied with the beautiful scenery that surrounds them to even bother noticing that they are in fact exercising. It is also of importance to note that individuals with clinical depression tend to be less active than healthy average adults. Furthermore, many recent studies show that aerobic and anaerobic exercise seems to be equally effective in producing antidepressive effects.

Next we will discuss the benefits of a healthy diet as it relates to one's overall heart health. A healthy diet and lifestyle are your best weapons to combat cardiovascular disease according to just about any credible medical journal or medical professional. However, there are no shortage of mixed messages and myths circulating out there regarding what constitutes healthy eating and what constitutes unhealthy eating. There is good cholesterol and bad cholesterol. There are healthy fats that we should make a part of our diets, and there are types of fat that we should avoid like the plague. With all of these differing opinions about what is healthy and what is not, it's best to get informed from credible sources such as your medical doctor. After all, it is practically a full-time job to stay up-to-date with all of the latest diet news! It really is quite vital to bear in mind the fact that we all have very unique dietary needs based on our individual makeup. This is yet another good reason why we should turn to a trusted medical practitioner for the best advice on healthy eating habits as opposed to simply buying into everything we hear via word of mouth. In an effort to make this whole process as simple and

easy-to-follow as humanly possible, I have listed below the Recommended Food Choice Guidelines according to the American Heart Association:

Vegetables and fruits are high in vitamins, minerals and fiber — and they're low in calories. Eating a variety of fruits and vegetables may help you control your weight and your blood pressure.

Unrefined whole-grain foods contain fiber that can help lower your blood cholesterol and help you feel full, which may help you manage your weight and avoid binging on junk food late at night.

Eat fish at least twice a week. Recent research shows that eating oily fish containing omega-3 fatty acids (salmon, trout, and herring) may help lower your risk of death from coronary artery disease. Choose lean meats and poultry without skin and prepare them without added saturated and trans fat. Select fat-free, 1 percent fat, and low-fat dairy products.

Cut back on foods containing partially hydrogenated vegetable oils to reduce trans fat in your diet. Aim to eat less than 300 milligrams of cholesterol each day. Choose and prepare foods with little or no salt. Aim to eat less than 1500 milligrams of sodium per day.

***Drinking plenty of water is also central to the overall vitality of our bodies and our heart, especially since our bodies are comprised of just about 75% water. We need plenty of this all-important nutrient simply to sustain life! Not only does water keep us hydrated, but it serves to flush our systems, especially the kidneys and bladder, of waste products and toxins.**



In addition to these healthy food choices, I decided to borrow a few healthy eating tips that I have found to be extremely helpful personally from the website Helpguide.org, a trusted non-profit resource. Here they are:

Eating smart: A key step towards healthy eating

Healthy eating begins with learning how to “eat smart”. It's not just *what* you eat, but *how* you eat. Paying attention to what you eat and choosing foods that are both nourishing and enjoyable helps support an overall healthy diet.

- **Take time to chew your food:** Chew your food slowly, savoring every bite. We tend to rush through our meals, forgetting to actually taste the flavors and feel the textures of what is in our mouths. Reconnect with the joy of eating.
- **Avoid stress while eating:** When we are stressed, our digestion can be compromised, causing problems like colitis and heartburn. Avoid eating while working, driving, arguing, or watching TV (especially disturbing programs or the news). Try taking some deep breaths prior to beginning your meal, or light candles and play soothing music to create a relaxing atmosphere.
- **Listen to your body:** Ask yourself if you are really hungry. You may really be thirsty, so try drinking a glass of water first. During a meal, stop eating before you feel full. It actually takes a few minutes for your brain to tell your body that it has had enough food, so eat slowly. Eating just enough to satisfy your hunger will help you remain alert, relaxed and feeling your best, rather than stuffing yourself into a “food coma”!
- **Eat early, eat often:** Starting your day with a healthy breakfast can jumpstart your metabolism, and eating the majority of your daily caloric allotment early in the day gives your body time to work those calories off. Also, eating small, healthy meals throughout the day, rather than the standard three large meals, can help keep your metabolism going and ward off snack attacks.

Well, there you have it my friends. I sure hope all of this information has served you well and provided you all with a little bit of helpful knowledge regarding taking care of one of the most important organs we have – our heart. In closing, I would like to leave you with a few very valuable online resources in which you can find the latest and greatest information regarding heart health:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/>

<http://www.webmd.com/>

<http://health.nih.gov/>

<http://www.medscape.com/>

Any questions, comments, or concerns? If so, please contact the DG Counseling, Inc. newsletter editor Matt Rome at e-mail address thomas84.matthew7@gmail.com