

Straight From the Heart

Heart disease is the #1 killer in the United States—of both women and men. If you're not concerned about heart disease because you think it only affects other people, here are some facts. Heart disease is an equal opportunity killer. It is the leading cause of death for African Americans, Hispanics and whites. It strikes people of all ages, not just older people. And, it is the #1 killer of women as well as men.

Off the Radar Screen

Yet heart disease is not on the radar screen for many people. Until something serious happens, such as a heart attack, there are no symptoms to alert you that you even have heart disease, so it's easy to think that it's something that won't happen to you. Some people may think heart disease isn't an issue because they can "cure" heart problems with surgery. Although surgeries can help, heart disease is a lifelong condition. Even with surgery, arteries remain damaged, and the condition of blood vessels steadily worsens unless changes in daily habits are made.

Preventing Heart Disease

The good news, and one reason February has been designated as Heart Month, is that heart disease is largely preventable—there's a lot you can do. The earlier you learn about things you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease, the greater the likelihood that you'll have good heart health into a ripe old age. Even if you already have heart disease, there is much you can do to lessen its severity.

Here are three things you can do that will really help your heart:

- **Don't smoke**, and if you do quit.
- **Get moving.** 60 percent of Americans are not meeting recommended levels of physical activity, and almost 40 percent do no spare-time physical activity at all. Walking for 30 minutes on most days of the week can make a difference.
- **Begin a heart healthy eating plan.** Choose a diet low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, and moderate total fat. Good nutrition helps control other factors that can lead to heart disease, such as being overweight, and having high blood pressure and high cholesterol.