

Doc Talk - The Heart Speaks

by Maureen Molinari, RD, CDE

What is the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of the heart? Is it the fact that the heart pumps blood through the body? Or that it is a muscle that needs to be exercised like other muscles in the body? Or... do you think of feelings of love and emotions?

February is “Heart Health Month” and I’d like to suggest that when thinking about heart health, think kindly and passionately about the organ that makes one “*feel*.” A simple shift in how one thinks of the heart may provide motivation to make lifestyle changes that enhance physical and emotional health. After all, being in love makes people feel optimistic, energetic, focused and even motivated.

Try these simple tips to start taking better care of your heart.

- Load up on fruits and vegetables!
 - Substitute a half a cup of fruit for your morning orange juice; you’ll get more fiber and nutrients from the whole fruit.
 - Fill half of your lunch and dinner plates with vegetables or salad.
 - Try a new vegetable! We all get comfortable with our usual habits, so to keep your heart smiling, try something new. Roast some beets, mash cauliflower, or add Bok Choy to your stir-fry. Get creative; search the internet for a new vegetable recipe. Try EatingWell.com for inspiration.
- Eat better grains. Most breakfast cereals are loaded with sugar, and are highly processed. Try some oatmeal, not the instant type, the type you cook. Add heart healthy almonds, or walnuts for healthy fats and extra protein.
- Portion sizes, not carbohydrates, are the culprits for excess calories. Use this as a guide to portions:
 - One cup of cereal for breakfast, 2 slices of whole grain bread for lunch and one-half to one cup of pasta or rice for dinner.
 - Remember when reading labels, look at the portion size. You may be consuming more than double the amount of calories by not understanding portion sizing.
- Use fats that help the heart, not hurt it. Say yes to olive oil and canola oil. Limit or eliminate purchased baked goods, even muffins. Make your own! It’s simple and will certainly save you money.
- Try thinking of your red meat as a condiment, instead of the main attraction. Less red meat means less saturated fat and that will make your heart happy.
- Plan ahead so you **do** have time.

Most people would do anything to avoid a “broken heart.” Isn’t making some simple changes to one’s diet worth avoiding heart disease? Here’s one more idea: take time to tell the people you care about how important they are to you. Watch them smile and feel the warmth your own heart when spreading those good feelings around.

Maureen Molinari is a Registered Dietitian and Diabetes Educator providing services for Teton Valley Health Care.

