FOCUS ON YOUR HEALTH TO HELP YOUR HEART

Too often, women don’t make their health a priority, putting the needs of their family, friends and co-workers ahead of their own. But ignoring your physical and mental well-being could be bad news for your heart. The leading cause of death among women in the United States is heart disease. But the good news is that it may be preventable if you focus on taking care of yourself. Here are some ways to live a healthy life and keep your ticker in tip top shape.

PUT YOUR NEEDS FIRST: Women often put aside their own needs to help others, but if you want to reduce your risk of heart disease, you must think about your own health. Find ways to reduce stress in your life, whether it’s through activities you love, getting adequate sleep, building a support system of family and friends or just finding ways to cope with difficult situations. Depression and heart health are often linked, because lack of energy makes it more difficult to live an active, happy lifestyle. After all, you can’t take care of others if you don’t take care of yourself.

STAY ACTIVE: Physical activity can help to lower blood pressure, raise HDL (good) cholesterol, stabilize blood sugar and keep weight off. It can also lower your risk of other diseases, such as diabetes and cancer. And you don’t have to move for hours to see the benefits. Aim for 30 minutes of aerobic activity per day, 5 times per week, and even that can be broken up into short 10-minute segments. Try brisk walking, swimming, cycling, a group fitness class—whatever heart-pumping exercise you love to do.

EAT RIGHT: We know vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean proteins and low-fat dairy all make up a heart-healthy diet, but how can you fit all of that into your meals? Start your day with veggies in your eggs or smoothie. Throw fruit like apples, strawberries or blueberries into a salad. Swap your pasta or white bread with other whole wheat alternatives. Skinless chicken breasts, eggs, beans and lentils are great options instead of red meat. All of these choices can help limit saturated fat, which can clog your arteries, raise your cholesterol, and put you at risk
for obesity and Type 2 diabetes. Not sure how to change your diet? Chat with a well-being coach, available at no additional cost to STOH members and their covered spouses.

**QUIT UNHEALTHY HABITS:** If you smoke, think of your heart and make a plan to quit. After one year without cigarettes, your risk of a heart attack drops sharply. Plus, you’re creating a healthier environment for your friends and family by reducing their exposure to second hand smoke. Alcohol can also contribute to heart disease, so imbibe in moderation. For women, this means one drink per day.

**KNOW THE SIGNS OF A HEART ATTACK:** Even though the most common symptom of a heart attack is chest pain or discomfort, many women often experience other signs, often different from men. Many women describe their heart attack symptoms as feeling like the flu. Other signs include heartburn, nausea, vomiting, shortness of breath, dizziness and radiating pain into the neck, back, arms and throat. Knowing the symptoms can help save both your life and the lives of those you love.