

News Column

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Focus on Heart Health this Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day is the traditional celebration of love between couples and friends to show their admiration for one another. As the iconic symbol used to market this holiday, we will see hearts of various shapes and sizes on cards and gifts.

February is American Heart Month, so while you're enjoying all the thoughtful gifts and treats take a minute to think about your heart health.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. This is also true for Kansas as heart disease is the leading cause of death in our state. Making healthy lifestyle choices can help to prevent many different heart diseases. Two of the main areas that have the greatest impact on heart health are nutrition and physical activity.

Dietary quality is especially important as this is the top risk factor for heart disease as it accounts for nearly half of heart-related deaths worldwide.

The American College of Cardiology and the American Heart Association has identified several dietary recommendations including following a healthy diet that is high in vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts, whole grains, and fish. They also recommend choosing foods lower in sodium and cholesterol, especially as you age. Try replacing saturated fats with unsaturated fats by cooking with vegetable oil instead of butter. Sugary drinks are also related to heart disease, so try to opt for unsweetened beverages when possible.

Along with a healthy diet, physical activity is a large contributor to a healthy heart. The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommends that adults get a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity each week. Even greater benefits have been linked to those who also include muscle-strengthening at least twice a week.

This might seem daunting, but something as simple as walking five more minutes a day could help you prevent life-threatening diseases.

There are many tools available to you as you try to make healthy choices. MyPlate, the Nutrition Facts Label and many more are great places to start!

As you enjoy those little chalk hearts with sweet messages on them in the weeks to come, think about how you can contribute to a healthier lifestyle so you can gain the long-term benefits.

For more information about Family and Community Wellness, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension, contact the office at 620-583-7455, email me at celutz@ksu.edu or stop by the office. Visit the K-State Research and Extension - Greenwood County Facebook page and www.greenwood.k-state.edu for more up-to-date information on programming.