

A healthy heart is a happy heart

Moving Grays Harbor
By Maryann Welch

Love is a many splendored thing...yes, Valentine's Day is a great reminder of the need for physical activity. Now before you get lost in my thought process, let me explain! Love, Cupid, and paper hearts are all associated with Valentine's Day, but instead of thinking of hearts as something we can give away, we should be thinking of hearts as not only a vital player in our circulatory systems, but as a muscle that benefits from proper exercise and nutrition. So, in order to spread love and good cheer on Valentines Day (and all year long for that matter) we have to keep ourselves healthy. No need to worry about the perfect flowers or candy; your own health can be the best possible Valentine to give!

According to American Heart Association statistics, 700,000 lives are claimed each year in the United States by heart disease. Although heredity does play a major part in our personal health, many of the risk factors associated with heart disease are simply life-style choices.

The basic recommendations for heart-healthy living are really no different than the tips for cancer or diabetes prevention, so the more risk factors you are able to eliminate; the more likely you are to avoid a serious illness. Let's review a few tips for heart-healthy living:

- Talk with your doctor about your risk factors and what you

can do to make changes in your lifestyle.

- Avoid tobacco, and if you consume alcohol do so only in moderation.
- Get moving! Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise on five or more days of the week.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Follow a heart-healthy diet. That means eating lots of fruits and vegetables, cutting out added salt, and eating less saturated fat and cholesterol.

Okay, I can sense all the groans that these recommendations are going to solicit and I don't blame you. It's the same old thing that all manner of health educators have been pushing down our throats for years and years. Believe me; I used to feel the same way! However, until I really started making this a priority in my life I was convinced that I was in decent health.

Another way to look at this is from the angle of an article I saw on the back page of the Daily World last week. The title of the article read "Obese, smokers cheaper to treat, study says". The outrage! This went against every fiber of my Public Health being so I had to read more. However, when I read the article I was anything but surprised. It was a research summary from a study in the Netherlands that in essence said healthy people cost the government more money. The findings indicated that from age 20-56 obese people racked up the most expensive health costs. But because both the smokers and the obese people died

sooner than the healthy group, it cost less to treat them in the long run.

So, for all you readers who think you are overtaxed, get your revenge by living long enough to be reap the reward of actually costing the government money! All kidding aside, as we think of all of the “Valentines” in our lives, don’t we owe it to them and to ourselves to live the healthiest life that we are able to? What are your dreams and goals for your own future? It is my wager that those dreams don’t include a serious illness. Take charge of your health and reduce your personal risk factors for all the people you love. And in return, may all of your “Valentines” do the same.

Have a happy and healthy Heart Day!

Maryann Welch is the recently retired director of Grays Harbor County’s Public Health and Social Services Department.

If you have questions about becoming more active or have information about free or low-cost activity in the area, contact the health department at 532-8665 ext. 483, e-mail us at moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us or visit our web site at www.ghphss.org.