

Small Steps – Strategies for Heart Health

By Janet Hackert, Regional Nutrition and Health Education Specialist

February is National Heart Month. February 3rd is National Wear Red Day to support cardiovascular health for women. In the U.S. heart disease kills one woman approximately every 80 seconds according to the American Heart Association (AHA). It is the leading cause of deaths for the population overall.

In February and throughout the year, follow these tips, as easy as ABC, to improve or maintain heart health:

A: Avoid tobacco. It won't be easy, but it will be easier than dealing with a heart attack, stroke or living with chronic heart disease.

B: Be more active. "Research has shown that getting 30–60 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week can help lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol and keep your weight at a healthy level."

C: Choose nutritious foods. The heart association's website, www.deliciousdecisions.org, has some tasty heart-healthy recipes.

Generally, people know what to do; making it happen is another story. Research has shown that making changes toward a healthier lifestyle are more likely to become habit for the long term if they are made in small increments. Here are some strategies that may help.

Track current behavior to know the starting point, how much exercise is really happening, how many steps, how much vegetables are really being consumed currently.

Defy the odds by learning what the likelihood of having heart problems is, then set specific, small-step goals to steer clear of living up to those odds by losing weight, being more active or quitting smoking.

Use the power of ten to motivate: 10 extra minutes of walking or weight lifting morning and evening, or use a step counter to measure movement and walk a little more to round steps up to the next thousand, or cut daily calorie intake by 100 calories per day.

Meet yourself halfway by not giving up the foods you like, but instead cutting the amount of the high-calorie, high-sugar, high-fat and/or high-sodium ones in half anytime you eat them.

These simple strategies and many others can help motivate and move a person to a healthier life and avoid or delay being a heart association statistic.

For more information on this or any other topic, contact me, Janet Hackert, at 660-425-6434 or HackertJ@missouri.edu, or your local [University of Missouri Extension Center](#). University of Missouri Extension - your one-stop source for practical education on almost anything.

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