

“Have a Healthy Heart”  
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As we celebrate Valentine’s Day by showering our loved ones with chocolates and flowers, don’t forget that we also celebrate the “Go Red for Women” campaign of the American Heart Association this month to raise awareness that heart disease is preventable and the number one killer of *both* men and women! There are major risk factors that research shows significantly increase the risk of cardiovascular disease and there are contributing risk factors which are associated with increased risk but their significance and prevalence have not been pinpointed yet. (Source: American Heart Association) The major risk factors can be divided into two categories: ones we can and cannot change. Getting older, being male, and heredity (including race) are all risk factors that we have no control over. However, there are many risk factors that we can control by changing our lifestyle. The focus of this article will be on these factors that we can do something about. Major risk factors that can be controlled:

- Tobacco Smoke
- Physical Inactivity
- Obesity and Overweight
- Diabetes Mellitus

- High Blood Pressure
- High Cholesterol

If you smoke, quit. Talk to your doctor about your desire to quit smoking and he or she will help you. The risk of developing coronary heart disease for a smoker is 2–4 times that of nonsmokers. Exposure to second hand smoke increases the risk of heart disease in nonsmokers, too.

Engage in regular, moderate-to-vigorous physical activity for at least 30 minutes every day for adults and at least one hour for kids. Physical activity helps to control blood cholesterol, diabetes, and obesity, as well as lower blood pressure in some people. The Citrus County’s Fitness Challenge which is going on right now (it started on February 1 and runs for five weeks through March 7) motivates us to incorporate more physical activity into our daily lives.

Reaching and maintaining a healthy weight by eating nutritious foods without added calories, fats, sugars, sodium, and doing regular physical activity is also extremely important to reduce the risk of heart disease. People who have excess body fat, especially if it’s primarily located around their waist are more likely to get heart disease even if they have no other risk factors.

For the last three major controllable risk factors—high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and diabetes mellitus—I would encourage everyone to visit their physician regularly, get screenings, and follow your doctor’s advice to keep these numbers in the normal range.

Other factors that contribute to heart disease are stress and alcohol use. Be sure to find ways to manage stress wisely (exercise is a great stress reliever) and avoid using alcohol to excess.

For more information, call Monica Bonsett at the Extension office at 352-527-5713. Citrus County Extension links the public with the University of Florida/IFAS' knowledge, research, and resources to address, youth, family, community, and agricultural needs. All programs and related activities sponsored for, or assisted by, the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences are open to all persons with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions, or affiliations.

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