

The Daily Union Article

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Title: Celebrate February

February is a great month to celebrate. It's the month of Valentine's Day which symbolizes love, flowers, Valentine's cards, and chocolate. It's the last full month of the winter season making the end of this cold season in Kansas a closer reality. It is also American Heart Month.

While Valentine's Day and the nearing end of winter might lighten your mood and warm your heart, American Heart Month poses a more serious and serene response – especially for those suffering from heart disease.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States. One in four deaths in the U.S. is caused by heart disease. Most of those reading this article knows of someone, or several, who have died as a result of this disease. But don't let the story end there. Heart disease can often be prevented when people make a concerted effort to live a lifestyle that includes healthy eating habits and regular physical activity.

No one wants to contribute to the U.S. heart disease statistics. You know about heart disease but you, like too many other Americans, push back against making changes. You might think it is too hard to do, that you don't have the resources needed, or that you are already too far down the path of heart disease to make a difference but those thoughts are simply not true. Believe it or not, you have many resources at your disposal to make positive strides toward a heart-healthy lifestyle.

A quick and simple first step is to change how you season your food at home. Instead of grabbing for the salt shaker, try using spices to add a variety of flavor to your food. Not just any seasoning will squelch your palate's conditioned desire for salt. You'll need those seasonings that are most flavorful and offer the nice "bite" that salt does. Check out these seasoning options to help you develop less salt-dependent taste buds:

Herb or Spice	Food Combination
Basil	Tomato dishes and tomato sauces, and fresh pesto
Chives	Salads, fish, potatoes and tomatoes
Cilantro	Salsa and with tomatoes
Dill	Carrots, fish, green beans, cucumbers, potatoes, tomatoes and use in dips
Garlic	Beef, pork, potatoes, and green beans
Oregano	Peppers, tomatoes and tomato sauces
Parsley	Potatoes and salads

Rosemary	Chicken, fish, lamb, pork, roasted potatoes, soups, stews, tomatoes and breads
Sage	Use as a pork or poultry seasoning and in whole grain stuffing
Thyme	Eggs, lima beans, potatoes, poultry, summer squash and tomatoes

Instead of using the full amount of salt in a recipe, try cutting the amount by half. Take the salt shaker off the table to help resist the urge to season before tasting. If you like to use seasoning salt, switch to seasoning mixes that have no salt. I have found that my family really like a roasted garlic seasoning blend or an onion-based seasoning blend.

You can reduce your sodium intake by consuming reduced sodium soups or using frozen vegetables instead of canned ones, which are often high in sodium. Draining and rinsing canned vegetables and beans with water will also help reduce sodium.

Another dietary change you can make is to reduce total fat and/or calories. People who consume a diet that is high in saturated fat are at greater risk of heart disease due to the accumulation of cholesterol in the body and specifically, the inside of the arteries. This narrows the arteries and makes them less flexible resulting in a condition known as atherosclerosis. If a narrowed artery becomes blocked, a heart attack or stroke can result. High cholesterol is one of the major risk factors for coronary heart disease, heart attack and stroke, but it can be controlled by making a change in your diet.

People who are in relatively good health, with no indication of heart disease should limit saturated fat to less than 10% of their total daily calories. For those who have already been diagnosed with heart disease, even fewer calories from saturated fat – with a limit of 7% of calories coming from saturated fat.

By reading labels, you can make simple food choices that can help you reduce your cholesterol. Here are a few examples of substitutions you can make without losing the flavor of foods you enjoy or the function they provide in a recipe:

Instead of...	Try this instead...
Butter, margarine, oil, shortening, or solid fat (in pan frying, sautéing, or stir-fry)	Use cooking spray, water, broth, and/or nonstick pans to reduce fat in these cooking methods. Or use a different cooking method, such as baking, boiling, broiling, grilling, poaching, roasting, or microwaving.
Whole milk, half and half, or evaporated milk	Use skim milk, 1% milk, evaporated skim milk, fat-free half and half, or plain soy milk with calcium
Whole-fat cheese	Use reduced-fat cheese, added at the end of the baking time or use part-skim mozzarella.
Full-fat cream cheese	Use the low-fat alternative or nonfat cream cheese (Neufchatel cheese), or low-fat cottage cheese pureed until smooth.

Full-fat cottage cheese	Use 2% or fat-free cottage cheese
Higher-fat beef cuts	Use leaner cuts of beef or ground beef, such as sirloin, top round roast, or bottom round roast. Drain fat off cooked ground beef.
Poultry with skin	Remove the skin of poultry or turkey before cooking
Canned fish packed in oil	Choose canned fish products packed in water

Making lifestyle changes can be difficult, but if you start with the small steps like making healthy food choices, you can gain traction that will lead you to a healthier body. Celebrate February and American Heart Month by committing to a healthier and happier heart! Until next time, keep living resourcefully!