



Catawba County Public Health

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FEBRUARY IS A MONTH FOR FOCUSING ON OUR HEARTS – FOR BETTER HEALTH

HICKORY, N.C. – February is unquestionably a month for hearts. With Valentine’s Day on February 14 and National Heart Month running all month, it’s a time to think about what makes a heart healthy. It might not sound very romantic, but maintaining a healthy diet and physical activity helps keep blood flowing efficiently through your heart.

Heart health is especially important in our community, as heart disease is the second-leading cause of death in Catawba County, according to the 2015 Community Health Assessment.

When it comes to heart health, small changes can make a big difference. Set and meet goals to help keep your heart healthy. Before embarking on your heart health journey, talk to your doctor and schedule testing, if needed.

There are seven main ways to help your heart stay healthy, according to the American Heart Association’s Go Red for Women campaign and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Million Hearts campaign:

- Add more exercise to your daily routine. Adults should start with at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity five times a week. Children need 60 minutes a day every day to get them off to a healthy start.
- Increase the amount of healthy cholesterol (HDL) you consume, while reducing the bad cholesterol (LDL). If your doctor recommends medication to lower your cholesterol, take it as prescribed. Switch to eating more whole grains, fish, fruits and vegetables and less fried foods, fewer animal products high in saturated fat and fewer processed foods.
- Eat more heart-friendly meals by cooking at home with reduced sodium (salt).
- Monitor your blood pressure and take medication if it is prescribed to you by your doctor. High blood pressure is a major contributor to heart disease because of the strain it places on the heart and blood vessels.
- If you smoke, take steps to quit. Your physician can advise you on what methods might be best for you. Smoking damages your circulatory system and puts you at risk for coronary artery disease. Smoking also damages your lungs, making it harder to get the physical activity you need. Smoking can reduce your good cholesterol as well.
- Reduce your blood sugar by cutting back on simple sugars, such as those found in soda, candy and sugary desserts. Elevated blood sugars can result in Type II diabetes, which is a risk factor for developing heart disease.
- Lose weight. If you have too much fat, especially around your waist, you’re at higher risk for risk factors such as high blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol.

For people interested in having healthier hearts, setting goals is essential. For advice on setting your heart health goals, go to <http://firststeps.hearhelp.org.nz/home/the-future/my-future-plan/goal-setting/> or https://millionhearts.hhs.gov/files/HIS_My_Health_Progress.pdf for resources and more.

Catawba County Public Health, located off Fairgrove Church Road behind Catawba Valley Medical Center in Hickory, N.C., works to protect and promote the health of all county residents. For more information, please call (828) 695-5800 or visit www.catawbacountync.gov/phealth.

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“Leading the Way to a Healthier Community”

