

Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge!

February 2010 Newsletter

Whole Hearted Health

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Maintaining a healthy weight is important for your heart. When we are overweight, our heart has to work that much harder to supply those additional pounds with blood and nutrients. Maintaining a healthy weight is one way we can help our hearts. Additional weight, especially those pounds that accumulate around our midsection, places fat in close proximity to our hearts and is a risk factor for heart disease. February is national heart month, and here are some simple suggestions to ward off extra pounds that we accumulate by overeating:

➤ Do you eat while sitting in front of the TV? Or while driving in the car, sitting in the bed, or standing in the kitchen? When eating with distractions, it is easier to overeat. Pay attention to your food and not the television! Food is delicious, so chew slowly and enjoy the flavors. Take the time to put your fork down between bites. By slowing down, it allows your stomach to send a signal to your brain that you have eaten and are full.

➤ Do you eat directly out of the bag? By simply removing a portion from the bag and putting it in a bowl or on a plate, you are more likely to eat the proper portion size. When your hand keeps reaching into a bag that contains nine or ten servings, you no longer know how much you have really eaten.

➤ Are you drinking enough water? People can mistake thirst for hunger. Hydration is important, so have a glass of water before you open the refrigerator door.

➤ Are you getting enough sleep? Sleep at least seven hours a night. If you have difficulty getting to sleep or sleeping through the night, doing some physical activity during the day can ensure a more restful night. When we are sedentary during the day, there is no reason to be fatigued at night, so our bodies' natural rhythm is disrupted. Participating in physical activity can also relieve stress and alleviate muscle tension. Physical activity can be as uncomplicated as putting on a pair of your most

comfortable shoes and taking a walk. Or, you can take part in a yoga class or ride a stationary bike. Many options are available to suit different tastes. Be active during the day and experience restful sleep at night.

➤ Do you eat when you are upset? Many people do not recognize when they are truly hungry. They simply eat because they are bored, tired, or sad. Eating becomes an activity. We no longer eat to nourish ourselves, but we eat because it occupies our time. Find something else to do other than eat. Some simple suggestions are to walk around the block, take a bath, garden, knit, cross-stitch, or crochet, read a book, work a crossword puzzle, call a family member and catch up, give yourself a manicure, or write a letter. Take a look at an old family photo album and record your thoughts, dates, and occasions. It would be something very special for your family to cherish. There are many enjoyable activities other than eating.

➤ Do you know your own bad habits? Being aware of when it is most difficult for you to make healthy food choices is an important step in changing that

behavior. Do you munch on snacks late at night? Try going to bed a little earlier! Is your bad habit purchasing sugary or salty foods from the vending machine? Save the money you would be spending on candy bars and potato chips in a jar at home, and then treat yourself to a non-food reward at the end of the month. If you spend \$0.60 at the vending machine Monday through Friday, you could have save that change and have \$12.00 at the end of the month. You and your grandchild could go to an afternoon movie at the theater. Try picking out one bad habit, and change that repeated eating behavior.

As people, we are creatures of habit and tend to purchase the same foods at the grocery store, order the same items at our favorite restaurant, and repeat a daily routine. If there is an unhealthy behavior in that routine, it can be changed with small, consistent efforts. You are your own expert, because you know yourself best. Pick one of your behaviors that could be improved, and this February, take care of your health and your heart.

➤ More information is available at:
www.americanheart.org