



## **Heart to Heart** *By Joe Stein, President*



Let's sit and talk about your heart. Did you know that since 1963, every President of the United States has proclaimed February "American Heart Month?" This is significant because nearly a million Americans will die of cardiovascular disease this year, far more than any other illness. Cardiovascular disease includes heart attack, stroke, hypertension, Coronary Artery Disease and Peripheral Vascular Disease.

### **How to Avoid Becoming a Statistic**

The key to staying healthy is to minimize your risk factors. Genetic predisposition is an important risk factor. But do not despair, there is a lot you can do short of trading in your parents for some healthier folks.

### **Get a Physical**

If two or more years have passed and you haven't had a physical, it's time to meet with your doctor (especially if you're over 40.) Knowing and managing your heart-related vital statistics are critical to understanding the actions you must take to reduce your risk factors. Guidelines are constantly being revised, so this information is not a substitute for talking with your physician.

### **Know Your Numbers**

A cholesterol level under 200 with the (good) HDL above 40 is considered acceptable.

High blood pressure is responsible for over one-third of all cardiovascular problems; unfortunately 30% of hypertensive people are unaware of their condition. Normal blood pressure is below 120/80.

A relative newcomer on the risk management front is the ability of C-reactive protein (CRP) to predict cardiovascular disease. CRP is associated with the inflammation in the lining of the arteries linked to an accelerated rate of plaque build up. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently set the "High Risk" category at anything over 3.0mg/L.

### **Stop Smoking**

Need I repeat what we have all heard before? Tobacco accelerates your heart rate while hardening your arteries and constricting blood vessels. This triple threat raises your blood pressure. See your doctor for determining the best way to kick this habit.

### **Choose Wisely**

Consuming a low fat, high fiber diet that includes at least a combined five daily servings of fruits and vegetables can lower bad cholesterol and raise the good. Eating several servings a week of omega-rich, cold-water fish; such as salmon, tuna or mackerel may protect your heart.

### **Reduce Salt**

Excess salt causes a buildup of fluids in your body, making your heart work harder to pump blood. Many experts recommend a maximum of 2,400 mg, the equivalent of one teaspoon. Many foods considered safe contain more salt than you might expect. Read food labels carefully: canned soups and vegetables, breakfast cereals, crackers and lunchmeats are all suspect. Many fried fast foods such as chicken; burgers and French fries can have over a day's supply of salt in one meal.

### **Exercise**

Research has shown that cardiovascular exercise increases the strength of the heart, allowing it to pump more blood with each beat. The technical term is increased stroke volume, and it's this increased blood flow that carries more oxygen throughout the body. While coursing through your body, the oxygen-rich blood metaphorically acts like scrubbing bubbles to scrape the build up of plaque on artery walls. Since your heart is becoming stronger as a result of exercise, it will not have to beat as many times while it is at rest, thus lowering your resting pulse rate and saving beats.

In addition, the exercise itself burns calories—not as many as you may think—but enough over the long haul to significantly aid in weight management. If you would like a chart detailing how many calories are burned while performing various activities and sports, please call me at 732-345-5151 or e-mail me at [joe@renaissancefitness.com](mailto:joe@renaissancefitness.com) and I will send you a copy.

The most important thing to remember is that you have the ability to improve your health by reducing risk factors. Other than family history, the choices are yours. I'm glad we had this heart to heart talk; now get out there and choose wisely.

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