

# Who Loves You Baby?

*February 2007*

Happy Valentine's Day! On February 14th attention will be focused on the heart, a symbol of love and romance. It's the perfect time for a heart to heart talk about cardiovascular fitness! You may be thinking that you are far too young to be concerned with heart disease. The truth is that the lifestyle habits you set in motion now will have a significant impact on the future health of your heart. If your heart could speak here is what it would say:

## **Live Smoke Free**

Smoking doubles your chances of developing heart disease. Tobacco suppresses the "good" cholesterol (HDL) and also increases the risk of developing certain cancers and osteoporosis.

## **Get Moving!**

Regular exercise can increase the "good" HDL cholesterol, control weight, lower blood pressure and reduce stress. Exercise doesn't have to be intense to be beneficial. Research shows that just 30 to 45 minutes of physical activity over the course of a day can improve your health. Before starting any program of physical activity, be sure to check with your health care provider.

## **Trim Down**

People who maintain a healthful weight are not only less likely to develop heart disease, but also decrease their risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, gall-bladder disease and certain types of cancer.

## **Feeding A Healthy Heart**

It's easier than you think.

- Choose low fat proteins! Switch to low fat milk and eat way less cheese. Eat more skinless poultry and fish and less red meat. Add beans to your diet—they provide both protein and fiber and can reduce total blood fat levels.
- Eat more veggies and fruits—especially apples, citrus, berries, apricots and carrots. These are rich in soluble fiber which lowers total fat and cholesterol levels.
- Go whole grain! Whole grains like oats, brown rice and high fiber cereals provide fiber and other nutrients that play a role in regulating blood pressure and heart health.
- Go a little nuts! Nuts are packed with fiber, vitamins and minerals, including calcium, folate, potassium, magnesium and vitamin E. Studies have shown that walnuts and almonds can reduce blood cholesterol levels. Worried that nuts will make you fat? Research suggests that nut eaters are apt to lose weight and keep it off because nuts curb hunger by satisfying the desire for some fat.

## **Gift Of The God's**

Chocolate's romantic symbolism reaches far back to Mayan and Aztec traditions, and to the belief that chocolate contains mysterious properties that seduce the heart. Chocolate—particularly dark chocolate—contains antioxidants that promote heart health.

The cocoa used to make chocolate is rich in flavonoids that are linked to a decreased risk of cardiovascular disease. Dark chocolate also contains cocoa phenols, which studies have found to lower blood pressure. But don't take this as license to indulge—chocolate is high in calories and should be consumed in moderate amounts as part of a healthy diet.