

# Parish Nurse Ministry Notes



**The month of February is American Heart month, so your parish nurses would like to share the following heart health information with you.**

The heart is one of the most important organs in the entire body. It is just a pump that circulates blood and brings nourishment to all other areas of the body, but there are many factors that have an effect on how our heart behaves. We are the stewards of our body with the freedom to make healthy choices. It is important to look at what we put into our bodies. The foods that we eat, the beverages that we drink and other substances that we ingest all play a role in heart health. Exercise is another component to sustaining heart health. How we exercise our bodies plays a major role in a healthy heart. Knowing your numbers is also important. Maintaining target cholesterol levels and blood pressure numbers can prevent various heart related problems. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of heart health is the emotional component of our being. Our emotions play a big part in what takes place in our bodies.

## **Eat a Heart-Healthy Diet:**

Eat foods that are low in fat, cholesterol and salt. Increase your intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products. Beans, other low-fat sources of proteins and certain types of fish can also reduce your risk of heart disease.



## **Alcohol and Tobacco:**



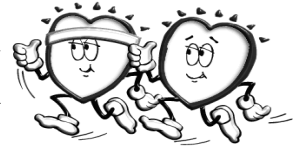
There are many studies regarding the use of small amounts of red wine and heart health. This should be discussed with your doctor. Other alcoholic beverages can have various effects on the heart and should be avoided. The use of alcohol should be discussed with your physician.

Smoking or using tobacco is one of the most significant risk factors for developing heart disease. Chemicals in tobacco can damage your heart and blood vessels, leading to narrowing of arteries, also called atherosclerosis. Atherosclerosis can lead to a heart attack. No amount of smoking is safe. Nicotine in cigarettes and smokeless tobac-

co make your heart work harder. When you quit smoking, your risk for heart disease drops dramatically within just one year.

## **Exercise:**

Getting some regular, daily exercise can reduce your risk of heart disease. Physical activity can also help you to maintain a healthy weight. Try to get at least 30 – 60 minutes of moderately intense physical activity most days of the week. However, even shorter amounts of exercise offer heart benefits so if you can't meet those guidelines, don't give up. You can even break up your workout time into 10 minute sessions. Activities such as gardening, housekeeping, taking the stairs and walking all count toward your total for the day.



## **Know Your Numbers:**

According to the American Heart Association, high total cholesterol, blood pressure, and fasting glucose are all risk factors for heart disease. Cholesterol is a soft, waxy substance found in the blood and body's cell, and high levels may lead to atherosclerosis. The goal for total cholesterol is less than 200 mg/dl. High blood pressure makes the heart work harder than normal. The goal for blood pressure is less than 120/80 mm Hg. Diabetes can increase your risk of heart disease and stroke. Fasting glucose levels should be less than 100 mg/dl.

## **Emotional Component and Stress:**

A growing body of evidence suggests that psychological factors are heartfelt and can contribute to cardiac risk. Our perceptions of life situations can be either negative or positive. There are many facets that color perceptions thus causing stress. Just a few major stressors that have been studied are workplace stress, financial stress and disaster related stress. There are many more conditions in ones milieu that can be stressors.

## **Stress-easing Strategies**

There are some things you can do to decrease the stress in your life and help you to better cope with stressful situations. Get enough sleep, learn relaxation techniques, learn time-management skills, and nurture yourself. Living live consciously and being aware of your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health all contribute to a healthy heart.

# PUZZLES

HAPPY POOR

HEAVEN GENTLE

MOURN HUNGER

PURE HEART

MERCIFUL SPIRIT

REWARD EARTH



present  
peace  
parents

doves  
light  
child

Spirit  
glory  
Simeon

p r e s e n t

persnet

clihd

lgith

Smione

devos

pernat

goryl

Siprit

pecea

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