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Five Family-Friendly Tips to Promote Healthy Hearts at All Ages

Practical Advice During American Heart Month for Family-focused Lifestyle Interventions

MADISON, WISCONSIN (February 1, 2010) – Each year, February marks a shift in the nation's collective focus, as matters of the heart take center stage. While images of hearts abound, from pastel candies to Valentine's Day cards, health experts around the country are asking us all to turn our attention to a decidedly less-endearing picture: heart disease.

Prevention of coronary heart disease is highlighted throughout the month of February in honor of American Heart Month. This year, the Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association (PCNA) is asking American families to take a closer look at everyday habits that can help promote a healthy heart and reduce the risk of the nation's number one cause of death for men and women.

"Because risk factors for heart disease, such as excess body weight, diabetes and high cholesterol, can start developing in childhood, it's important to think about prevention at all stages of life," notes PCNA President, Jane Nelson Worel, MSN, APRN-BC, APNP, FAHA, FPCNA. "When families focus on behavior change together, they have a much stronger support system, helping them sustain their commitment to a healthier lifestyle."

PCNA recommends small, simple changes in lifestyle habits to help lay the foundation for a heart-healthy future:

1. Make nightly dinner a family occasion and turn off the TV while eating. Research shows that children who shun the tube during mealtime have higher-quality diets than those who watch-and-eat.

2. Although a leisurely breakfast is often impossible in busy, bustling households, make sure no one leaves for the day on an empty stomach. Eating breakfast helps promote weight control, which is increasingly important as excess body fat is a leading risk factor for heart disease.
3. Family game night is a great idea – if you get out of your chairs and move! In lieu of board games, organize a scavenger hunt, play charades or have an old-fashioned pillow-sack race. Adults can benefit from just 30 minutes of increased physical activity daily. Children and adolescents should aim for 60 minutes per day.
4. Get kids involved at all stages of meal planning and encourage “ownership” of healthy meals and snacks. At the grocery store, assign each child a different color and ask them to choose one new fruit or vegetable based on the hue-of-the-day.
5. Don’t expect your children to limit TV or computer time, eat right or get regular physical activity if you aren’t doing the same. Visit www.FamilyAtHeart.org for more tips on setting an example with healthy behaviors and encouraging a lifelong commitment to heart health. “Its never too early and never too late to prevent heart disease,” advises PCNA.

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