

CENTERSTAGE

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February is American Heart Month, Are Your Loved Ones Knowledgeable?

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States. Every year, 1 in 4 deaths are caused by heart disease, according to the American Heart Association.

Talking with your loved ones about heart disease can be awkward, but it's important. In fact, it could save a life. At the dinner table, in the car, or even via text, have a heart-to-heart with your loved ones about improving heart health as a family. Engaging those you care about in conversations about heart disease prevention can result in heart-healthy behavior changes.

Here are three reasons to talk to the people in your life about heart health and three ways to get the conversation started.

Three Reasons You Should Talk to Your Loved Ones About Heart Health

1. More than physical health is at risk

Millions of people in the US don't know that they have high blood pressure. High blood pressure raises the risk for heart attacks, stroke, heart disease, kidney disease and many other health issues. Researchers are learning that having high blood pressure in your late 40s or early 50s can lead to dementia later in life. Encourage family members to be aware of blood pressure levels and monitor them consistently.

2. Feel Younger Longer

Just as bad living habits can age you prematurely and shorten your lifespan, practicing good heart healthy habits can help you feel younger longer. On average, U.S. adults have hearts that are 7 years older than they should be, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Just beginning the conversation with the people in your life that you care about can begin to make changes in their heart health.

3. You Are What You Eat

Even small changes can make a big difference. Prepare healthier versions of your favorite family recipes by making simple ingredient swaps, simply searching the internet is all it usually takes to find an easy ingredient alternative. Find a new

recipe to cook for your family members, or get in the kitchen together and you'll finish with something delicious and possibly making some new favorite memories as well. When grocery shopping, choose items low in sodium, added sugar, and trans fats, and be sure to stock up on fresh fruits and vegetables.

Three Ways to Start the Conversation

1. Encourage family members to make small changes, like using spices to season food instead of salt.
2. Motivate your loved ones to incorporate physical activity into every day. Consider a family fitness challenge and compete with each other to see who can achieve the best results.
3. Avoid bad habits together. It has been found that smokers are twice as likely to quit if they have a support system. This applies to practicing healthier practices as well. Set goals and start by making small, positive changes, chances are they may have a big difference.

The key to heart health is a healthy lifestyle. It's important to try to let go of bad habits that increase your risk of heart disease. By setting small, achievable goals and tracking those goals, you can possibly extend your life expectancy a little bit each day.

Heart disease can be prevented by making healthy choices and consciously monitoring health conditions. Making healthy choices a topic of conversation with your family and loved ones is a great way to open the door to healthier practices in all walks of life.

References

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