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Mary Keith
Extension Agent
Foods, Nutrition and Health

Make It a Healthy Valentine's Day

Celebrate Valentine's Day this year by making a change for heart health. Pick just one thing that you can change in your lifestyle. Do you smoke? Work seriously to stop. Do you exercise daily? If not, start with 10 minutes a day, and work up gradually. Is your blood pressure or cholesterol high? Adjust your diet to decrease the fat and salt content.

The new Dietary Guidelines are out, and while they are not aimed directly at improving our heart health, if we follow them our hearts will be healthier. One recommendation that is easy to understand is to eat at least 2 cups of fruit and 2 ½ cups of vegetables every day. They are low in fat and sodium and high in fiber. They also have minerals such as potassium and magnesium that help lower blood pressure. And while the studies about supplements helping our health give conflicting results, every one shows that eating plenty of fruits and vegetables has no bad side effects, only good health effects.

Choose a variety in your fruits and vegetables. You want to get at least a couple of dark green ones each week, a couple of dark yellow and orange ones, a couple beans and legumes, and a couple of starchy ones each week. You don't need to eat every kind every day, just balance them out over the whole week. .

Remember that canned or frozen can be just as good as fresh if you choose well. Look for 'No Salt Added' or 'Canned in Juice'. Select plain frozen vegetables, not the ones in butter or sauce. Buy plain frozen fruit to top with fat-free yogurt, instead of frozen pie.

Finally, if it's just not Valentine's Day without chocolate, pick dark chocolate. It has less fat and sugar than milk chocolate, and more of the good things that help lower our blood

pressure. Stick to just a piece or two, so that you'll be around to celebrate many more Valentine's Days with your loved ones.