

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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American Heart Month – Protect Yours!

Happy Valentine's Day! February is American Heart Month. If you don't know someone who's had a stroke, heart attack or suffers from some other form of heart disease, you are a very rare person! Unfortunately most of us have family members with heart disease, know or work with persons with heart disease, and 'way too many of us suffer from heart problems ourselves. That is so unfortunate, because so much of it is preventable. But still, over 2000 people every day die of heart disease in the US. What are you doing to protect yourself?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is leading a campaign called the Million Hearts. Their aim is to prevent one million heart attacks and strokes in the US over the next 5 years. Take a look at their information if you're interested in the details at <http://www.cdc.gov/features/heartmonth/>. We're not doctors, we can't prescribe medications for ourselves, but there are lots of things you and I can do to protect our hearts.

The big one, the hard one, but probably the most effective one to do is get out and EXERCISE! Just get moving! Try to squeeze another 5 or 10 minutes of active exercise into each day. Walk in the morning, walk after dinner. Go dancing with your partner, or dance with the grandchildren at home. Go swimming, go ride a bike! If you've not been doing any exercise, then start slow and easy. If you have a hard time on your feet, exercise while you sit. There are DVDs, tapes and even TV programs of chair dancing. These will give your heart and muscles some exercise from the comfort of your chair. Be sure to talk to your doctor before you start any big exercise plans.

Another really useful tactic is to manage your blood pressure. Yes, we've all been told to stop eating too much salt. And that is part of the problem. But blood pressure management, just like most work management, is a team effort. Sodium is just one part, the bad-guy part of the management team. So less salt is important.

But there are 3 good guys on the management team too. Calcium – that's why low fat dairy products are so important. Potassium – eat your beans, have an avocado or some figs. We need 4,700 mg of potassium a day and most of us probably don't get as much as we should.

Magnesium – go nutty, just not too much. Nuts, chickpeas, spinach, pinto beans are all good sources of magnesium. These big three are the management team for keeping your blood pressure down. So stock up on them.

Another side of heart health is cholesterol control. As with blood pressure, the popular idea of control is just part of the picture. It's true we don't need to be eating a lot of high-cholesterol foods. But more importantly for managing the LDL, or 'bad', cholesterol is limiting how much saturated fat we eat. You can remember which ones are saturated by the S. **S**aturated fat is **S**olid fat. If it's stiff at room temperature, then most of the fat is saturated. Stay away from it.

Of course the liquid fats are oils, so those are the healthier options. Olive oil is good, but so are canola, safflower, peanut and most of the other liquid oils. Choose whichever you prefer or that fits your budget. On food packages, read the labels and choose the ones that have the least saturated fat. A rough guide is that for every 100 calories in a serving you don't want to see more than 1 g of saturated fat.

Here's a super-easy way to put all three of the blood pressure management team on the table in a family friendly way. Serve with low-sodium chips as a dip, spread on warm corn tortillas and sprinkle with lettuce and tomato for a meal, or serve as a side dish. For more heat use reduced fat cheddar with jalapeño peppers, or use hotter salsa. Keep your heart healthy and your tongue happy all year!

Salsa Refried Beans

2 16-oz cans reduced sodium pinto or kidney beans ½ cup salsa, mild or hot
½ cup shredded 50% reduced fat cheddar cheese ¼ tsp ground cumin

Pour beans with the juice from the cans into large non-stick skillet. Heat over medium. Cook for 5 minutes, stirring continuously so they don't stick. Use back of spoon to mash beans until almost smooth. Stir in salsa and cumin, cook and stir 1 minute more. Pour into shallow serving dish.

Sprinkle cheese over top, cover with lid or foil and let sit until cheese begins to melt. Serves 4.

Adapted from Eat Right for Less, Purdue University.

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