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Nutrition: A Vital Part of Heart Health Erin Schwab, CPP - Health Educator

Nutrition plays an important role in our overall health and wellness. The proteins, carbohydrates, and fats in our food help fuel our body, allowing us to function each day. Nutritious foods can also act as medicines for our body during an illness. Did you know that a healthy nutrition plan is also a vital part of our heart health?

Our heart is a muscular organ who is responsible for pumping blood and oxygen throughout our body. When our heart is at its healthiest, it can easily complete this important task. However, heart diseases such as coronary heart disease can interrupt that blood flow, which can lead to serious illnesses and even death.

The good news is that by making simple changes to your eating habits, you can prevent and even reverse the negative effects of heart disease. The Mayo Clinic offers eight tips to work towards a heart-healthy diet:

1. Control your portion size. For example, a serving of meat is 2-3 ounces, about the size of a deck of cards.
2. Increase your fruits and vegetables. This can be fresh, frozen, and even canned (just make sure to watch for low-sodium vegetables and fruits canned in juice or water).
3. Choose whole grains. Make the switch from white to whole-wheat bread and flour and look for high fiber cereals and oatmeal.
4. Limit unhealthy fats. Look at food labels and avoid trans-fats. Healthy fat options include olive oil, nuts and seeds, and avocados.
5. Eat lean protein. Protein is an important energy source, so including lean meat, poultry, fish, dairy, and eggs will help sustain you throughout the day.
6. Cut the salt. Try limiting your salt intake to less than a teaspoon a day. Incorporate herbs and spices to flavor your food.
7. Meal Plan. Healthy nutrition goals can be obtained by planning ahead. Make a daily or weekly home menu utilizing steps 1-6.
8. Do not forget a treat. It is ok to have an occasional treat, like a candy bar, bag of chips, or dessert. Including this step will help you maintain a necessary balance to your nutrition plan.

Change to our existing eating habits can be a challenge, but it does not have to be difficult. Start by making one or two healthy changes and build on from there. If you are not sure where to start, the

American Heart Association has some great recipes and even a grocery-shopping tool that helps you pick heart healthy foods. You can find those at <https://recipes.heart.org>

Nutrition is a vital part to heart health, but incorporating an active lifestyle, reducing alcohol and quitting tobacco will help you achieve the utmost heart health. For more details on keeping your heart healthy, visit www.heart.org