

# Heart Health

Take control of your cardiovascular health in a few simple steps

**Just** like a car's engine, we can think of our hearts as the engine within our body. We keep our cars running well by having them tuned up regularly so that they function well and last a long time. In turn, if we treat our heart in the proper way it will also stay healthy for many years. Ryan Goldman from the Body Firm Fitness Center reports they're noticing a change with their clients: "While many of our clients come to get in shape, the focus is changing from looking and feeling good right now to how they want to feel 10 to 20 years from now." Just like a car, how you treat your heart and body now is going to affect how it functions years from now.

The American Heart Association® reports that cardiovascular disease is the number one killer in the United States. "Heart disease is prevalent in our country, but it doesn't mean it's inevitable," says Ryan. There are modifiable risk factors that we have control over to keep our hearts healthy. Ryan suggests four action steps that we can all take to lead us on the path to cardiovascular health.

## Eat a Heart Healthy Diet

Most of us have heard about a heart healthy diet, but what exactly is it? "We should all be eating a diet low in saturated fat, cholesterol and salt and high in fiber," Ryan says. Diet alone will combat many of the risk factors for cardiovascular disease such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity and diabetes. Your daily calorie intake should be less than 30 percent from fat. Specifically, saturated fat should be less than 10 percent of your total daily calories. Salt intake should be no more than 2,400 mg per day and total cholesterol for the day should be less than 300 mg. Ryan suggests reading labels. "Once you begin to pay attention to labels and notice just how much saturated fat and cholesterol is in food items, you'll begin to choose your foods more wisely," says



Ryan. To work more fiber into your diet, he suggests selecting whole grain breads and pasta and to consume five servings of fruit and vegetables per day. "Examples of what a serving is would be one medium size apple, one half cup of canned vegetables or three quarters of a cup of 100 percent juice," says Ryan.

### **Don't Use Tobacco**

Smoking increases your risk of high blood pressure and heart disease. You wouldn't think about putting leaded gasoline in an unleaded vehicle because it would ruin the engine. "One of the best things you can do for your heart is to never smoke, but if you do, quit," says Ryan. Your physician can assist you with a smoking cessation program.

### **Get Regular Physical Activity**

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) recommends physical activity three to five times a week for 20 to 60 minutes each time to improve your cardiovascular fitness. "Before beginning any activity program, consult with your health care provider for clearance," says Ryan. Choose activities that you enjoy and be consistent. You don't have to fit yourself into a cookie cutter routine if that isn't your style. Many people hear the word "exercise" and moan at the thought of it. "Whatever you choose, it should be something that you enjoy and not something that you dread," Ryan says. Explore activities that you've done in your past or something you'd like to try. If you enjoy it and have fun, you're more likely to be consistent. "There's some kind of activity out there for everyone," says Ryan.

### **Know Your Numbers**

Take responsibility for yourself and schedule a yearly appointment with your health care provider. Have your blood pressure, weight, cholesterol and blood sugar levels checked. Discuss the results with your health care provider. If the numbers are not falling where they should be, make a plan and work to improve them.

The next time you change the oil in your car, ask yourself if you're taking care of your own engine as well. The four action steps above will assist you in maintaining a healthy heart that will keep on ticking for a very long time.