

Be Smart About Heart Health



American Heart Month Tips

February is American Heart Month, and as a leading community-based organization dedicated to improving the nation's health, the YMCA of Western Monmouth County offers the following tips to help families be heart healthy.

1. **Get Physical:** Being physically active every day is fun and can improve the function of your heart. Plan and schedule opportunities for active play; for example, include a brisk 10-minute trip around the block after meals or a 10-minute walking break during the day. If your family enjoys active video games, select versions that require moving the body's large muscle groups while playing.
2. **Take a Snooze:** Lack of sleep can be associated with elevated cholesterol and blood pressure. Adults need at least seven, but no more than nine hours of sleep at night to aid with the prevention of heart disease. Children need 10-12 hours of sleep per night. Develop bedtime routines for the whole family to assist with falling asleep faster and staying asleep.
3. **Shape Up Those Recipes:** Makeover your family's favorite recipes by reducing the amount of salt and saturated fat and substituting a lower fat food without sacrificing tastes. For example, use low-fat yogurt instead of sour cream and skip the seasoning packet and use pepper and olive oil instead. Read food labels to learn more about what is in the package, select foods that have less than 1,000 mg of sodium per serving.
4. **Feeling the Pressure:** Revised blood pressure guidelines from American Heart Association mean that nearly half of all Americans (46 percent) have high blood pressure. Lowering or maintaining normal blood pressure can greatly reduce your risk for heart disease and stroke. Start self-monitoring your blood pressure and know the numbers. Discuss the results with you doctor if needed.
5. **Play Together:** Spending time together as a family is a great way to reduce stress, which is important to heart health. Make homemade valentines for your children's classmates or build a snow fort together in the yard or the park.