

Take Care of Your Heart

While you're thinking Valentine hearts this month, take a few minutes to think about your own heart. Are you doing enough to keep your heart healthy? Did you know that heart disease is the number one killer of American men and women – more deadly than *all* forms of cancer combined? Knowing the risk factors for heart disease and taking steps to change them are key to a healthy heart. Factors that can damage the heart and lead to heart disease include high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, smoking, obesity or being overweight, an unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity, a family history of heart disease, or age (55 and above).

The Good News!

While you may not be able change some risk factors, such as age or family history, you can live a heart-healthy lifestyle and make changes now that will reduce your risks for the disease in the future:

- **Smoking Cessation:** Step number one is to stop smoking or using tobacco products. This is one of the most significant risk factors for developing heart disease. Chemicals in tobacco can damage your heart and blood vessels and lead to narrowing of the arteries, which causes heart attacks.
- **Physical Activity:** Get regular daily exercise, such as 30 minutes on most days of the week. This can also reduce your risk of heart disease. Physical activity can mean a walk or fitness class at the gym, but it can also mean gardening, doing chores, parking further away from the store, or taking the stairs at work.
- **Proper Nutrition:** A diet full of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein is healthy for your heart. Limit or avoid saturated and trans fats found in fried fast foods, bakery products, and pre-packaged snack foods. And, a heart-healthy diet can also help you maintain a healthy weight.
- **Limit Added Sugar:** Research shows that there is a direct link between sugar consumption and an increased risk of cardiovascular disease (JAMA). The risk of death more than doubles for those who consume more than 21% of their calories from added sugar.
- **Skip the Salt:** Eating too much sodium and/or salt is strongly linked to the development of high blood pressure, a risk factor for heart disease. The American Heart Association recommends that Americans eat less than 1,500 mg/day sodium for ideal cardiovascular health.

At PWC, we have several tools at your disposal to help with heart health and reducing the risk factors of heart disease, including:

- Many options for physical activity, including fitness floor, [aquatic arena](#), [group exercise classes](#), and [personal training](#).
- [Drop it! 2016](#) a free healthy living, wellness, and weight loss challenge with various activities that can help you get healthy this year!
- FITscripts, an eight-week program of supervised and group training, as well as nutritional education, for those who need to exercise but have a chronic condition or physical limitation preventing them from regular exercise. Click here for our [FITscripts brochure](#).
- Culpeper Wellness Foundation's [online health library](#) has lots of informative heart health articles, heart healthy recipes, and even a [heart health quiz](#) to test your knowledge!

Take a minute this month to think about your heart health – PWC is here to help!