



From the Heart...

February is American Heart Month, dedicated to supporting heart health and preventing heart disease. “Go Red Day” is February 2, focused on raising awareness about women’s heart health. In this issue of WoW, we share some heart healthy *Wellness tips*.

When we think of “heart,” we also think of *connection*, *caring*, and *compassion*, which are important to the social and emotional dimensions of wellness. We’ll touch on this here, too.

A Heart Healthy Lifestyle

There are many ideas about the basics—eat healthy, move more, and make stress benefit you. But it can be hard to sort through all of the conflicting information. It can be even harder to figure out how to create your own wellness habits. Here are some simple ideas.



For more information and lots of tips, visit www.heart.org

Healthy Eating

It seems like every week or so, someone on the news is saying “eat this” or “don’t eat this,” but then reporting the opposite later on? Here are a few ideas to consider:

- **Fruits and vegetables:** To lower your risk of heart attack and stroke, according to the *Harvard Heart Letter*, eat brightly colored fruits and veggies—think blueberries, tomatoes, and beets, for example. Try eating at least 5 fruits or vegetables a day. Any fresh fruit or vegetable could be good for you.
- **Sugar:** The World Health Organization recommends that most adults should not consume more than 10 teaspoons of *added* sugar per day. This is about the amount in one can of soda or 2/3 of a candy bar. Try to cut down or eliminate sugary beverages like soda.

- **Water:**¹ Many people don’t get enough water during the day. This is especially true for people whose weight is in the “obese” category, since they need more water to be hydrated than people with a lower weight. Not taking in enough fluids can result in declines in mental, emotional, and physical health, such as being less alert, feeling moody, having headaches, and becoming constipated.

Move More

Current recommendations are to get about 150 minutes each week of moderate activity, like walking—a popular and effective way to move more.² That’s 30 minutes a day, five days a week. This may seem like a lot for people who don’t exercise or move much. Many can benefit from three 10-minute walks during the day. Any added movement activity can be good for you.

Physical activity is especially important for people at risk or living with many mental health conditions. Many people in this group as being at risk of early death, obesity, and medical problems like diabetes, heart disease, and breathing problems. Walking is a great physical activity that has many physical and mental health benefits³. Walking can help you reduce health risks, improve thinking, and decrease symptoms of depression and anxiety. Moving more can be a valuable strategy to help you make stress work for you.



Tracking sheets and “map” trackers can be printed at www.UWALK.ca

A pedometer, a fitness tracker, or a smart phone app can help you track how much you walk. If you take a 30-minute walk, (that might be about 3000-4000 steps). You can also track other steps counted as you go through your daily activities. Set a walking or step goal and share with someone you trust. You may want to challenge yourself to add a few steps every day or increase your average steps.

Make Stress Benefit You

Stress is often described as a bad thing, but stress can be good. Facing and overcoming difficulties makes you stronger. Learn to recognize when you feel stressed. Discover how to take advantage of the energy and motivation stress can provide.

Long-term stress can be a problem. The American Heart Association suggests four areas for stress control:

- Be kind to yourself! We all talk with ourselves so, when you do, choose words that are positive, forgiving, gentle, and grateful.
- Take a break and walk or just sit for a minute and take a few deep breaths.
- Plan activities that give you pleasure and joy.
- Set time to breathe/relax every day.



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Women's Heart Health

The American Heart Association started the "Go Red" campaign to raise awareness that heart disease is the #1 killer among U.S. women. Women are also more likely than men to have a stroke. Hispanic and African American women are at even higher risk. Women often experience different symptoms of a heart attack than men, such as shortness of breath, back pain, jaw pain, and nausea.

Taking action for your own health begins with looking at your current health and ways to reduce your personal risks. Learn more about your personal risk through www.heart.org – Search for "My Life Check."

Social Wellness

Like all other dimensions, people's sense of social wellness varies greatly.

Social Relationships

Personal relationships are important. For many people, healthy relationships involve reciprocity and equality—

meaning giving as well as receiving. We need to be able to express our needs and ideas with people who support and care about us and to listen to others with an open mind.

Your social network is the collection of people in your life. Some people have a few relationships; others have many. The people in your social network may all know each other, or may be very separate. They might serve different roles by providing different types of support.

Social support comes in different forms. Some people in our lives provide emotional support, making us feel cared for and loved. Others provide practical help, such as a ride, a second pair of hands for complicated tasks, or motivation as an exercise buddy. We may get information support from people who can tell us where to find a bargain, which bus to take, or how to cook quinoa.

Having a lot of varied people in your life can be beneficial. Though a wide social network does not always equate to feeling connected. Similarly, being alone is not the same as feeling lonely.

Loneliness and How to Reduce It

Many people are lonely, which affects social wellness and contribute to poor health,⁴ a shorter life,^{i,5} depression, and vulnerability to telemarketing fraud,⁶ especially for elders. People can become isolated due to medical or mental health issues⁷ (whether one's own or a family member's)⁸ or due to the duties of caring for others.

It is important to help combat loneliness by boosting social networks.⁹ Online social support can be beneficial¹⁰ as can living in a place where you can easily interact with others.¹¹

Many people find that social media helps connect them with friends and family and helps them find others who share their interests. Social media also may help you become more engaged in your community.¹² Many specialty websites and online groups exist—for everything from hot air ballooning to model trains, catapulting pumpkins, and extreme ironing (on water skis or in trees). For overall wellness it would be important to limit your time online, since some people may experience

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negative effects from social media use, including social isolation, depression, and exposure to cyber-bullying.¹³

John Cacioppo, author of *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, recommends four steps to combat loneliness:

- Extend yourself by reaching out to others a little bit at a time.
- Plan to get out and reach out to talk or help others.
- Connect with groups of other people who you have something in common with others, whether that be a local music event, live role-playing games, sports, a book group, an exercise class, or a spiritual community.
- Expect the best! Approach activities with a sense of hope and optimism. Positive attitudes appeal to others and can be self-fulfilling prophecies.



For more information, see Cacioppo's interview in *The Atlantic* (April 6, 2017), called *How Loneliness Begets Loneliness*.

One way to fight loneliness is thinking positively about yourself. You can learn some strategies or get some support to help counteract negative expectations about others and about social events.¹⁴

Building your conversation skills can help you feel less anxious and more confident as you spend more time with others. To develop or improve any skill, you need to practice. Some people find it helpful to join a social skills class or a club like Toastmasters International to learn and practice how to speak clearly and keep others interested in what they have to say.

Emotional Wellness

Emotional and mental well-being lets us take on challenges and assess our strengths, limitations, and any areas we want to develop further. We can balance our ability to live and work independently while seeking and appreciating support and assistance.



Mother Teresa had many important things to say about ending loneliness:

Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.

Let us touch the dying, the poor, the lonely and the unwanted according to the graces we have received and let us not be ashamed or slow to do the humble work.

Peace begins with a smile.

Every time you smile at someone, it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing.

I want you to be concerned about your next door neighbor. Do you know your next door neighbor?

Compassion and Self-Compassion

Compassion is often defined as loving kindness. Some say that true compassion also comes with a desire and motivation to act to relieve the suffering of others. Generosity and kindness to others are often linked to happiness and well-being. For example, people who volunteer about two hours a week report feeling happier, greater life satisfaction, and less stressed, and may be healthier and live longer as well.¹⁵

However, compassion for others does not always translate into compassion for oneself. We mentioned Dr. Kristen Neff in the last WoW (January 2018), who describes components to self-compassion. The first is *self-kindness*, not judgment or harsh criticism. Do you call yourself names when you break something or make a mistake? Or are you kind and understanding, reminding yourself that you need some gentle self-care, since the mistake may be a sign that you are having a bad day?

Self-compassion is recognizing that you share a common humanity with the rest of the world, which is full of other imperfect people who make mistakes, break things, and face hardship at times.

You are not alone in your struggles.

Compassion, continued from page 3

Finally, self-compassion includes *mindfulness*—an awareness of the present moment, acknowledging what's going wrong and how you feel, but doing so in a way that is noticing and accepting without equating *you* with your negative experiences.

Don't suppress or ignore uncomfortable feelings, but don't let them consume you over either. Developing self-compassion takes practice and attention. Self-compassion can deliver big benefits, including a greater likelihood that you will take action to care for your own health.¹⁶



You can find more information and guided meditations at Dr. Neff's website: www.self-compassion.org

Stay Hopeful

Wellness is a conscious, deliberate process requiring being aware of and making daily lifestyle choices.¹⁷ We know from our own experience, and from supporting others, that making choices is not always so easy. Sometimes we get discouraged. Many people give up their New Year's resolutions by mid-February. *Stay hopeful!* Recognize that challenges and difficulties are part of life. Show self-compassion during the times when things don't go as you had planned. Continue to work on or adjust your plan. Your heart health can be strengthened by taking action—no matter how small.

Hope is the elevating feeling we experience when we see - in the mind's eye- a path to a better future. Hope acknowledges the significant obstacles and deep pitfalls along that path. True hope has no room for delusion.

—J. Groopman
The Anatomy of Hope

Find ways to adjust your daily habits so you can move a little more, eat a few more healthy foods, drink a bit more water, and make stress work for you.

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