February is American Heart Month

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When February comes around we all think of Valentine’s Day, Love, Romance and those flowers that special someone sent to you.
It’s February, American Heart Month, a time when the nation spotlights heart disease, the No. 1 cause of death of Americans.
In most cases, heart disease is preventable when people adopt a healthy lifestyle, which includes not smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, controlling blood sugar and cholesterol, treating high blood pressure, getting at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a week and getting regular checkups.
There are a number of things that we can all do every day to improve our heart health
We know that exercise and eating right leads to a healthier heart, but studies reveal that relaxation techniques also have a positive impact on heart health. You can try a few small changes throughout your day to promote relaxation.

- **Laugh more often.** Laughter can relieve your stress response and leave you with a good, relaxed feeling. Make it a habit to share funny jokes or stories with those around you. Don’t know a funny joke, ask Alexa to tell you one or ask a kid, my granddaughters love to tell me jokes.
- **Breathe deeply.** Deep breathing triggers your body’s relaxation response. Close your eyes and try to focus on slowly filling your belly with air. Hold your breath for a 3 second count, then slowly release your air until your heart rate and mind are at ease. Try doing three of these in a row to relax and ease that stress.
- **Meditate.** Meditation can wipe away the day’s stress and bring inner peace. Focusing your attention takes practice, especially in a world that’s filled with text messages, social media, and other distractions. Turn your phone, TV, computer, music, off and sit quietly, and concentrate on breathing. Start by taking a few minutes each day to unplug and eliminate the stream of jumbled thoughts that may be crowding your mind.
- **Get enough sleep.** Getting enough sleep at night allows your mind and body to rest so you are more equipped to handle stress, leaving you more at ease during the day. Sleep experts suggest aiming for about 7 to 9 hours of sleep. Maybe you need to start with going to bed 15 minutes earlier than your normal bed time. Keep adding 15 minutes each week until you have the recommended amount of required sleep.
  If you have trouble falling asleep, stop texting, messaging, and looking at social media 30 minutes before going to bed. Try meditating and deep breathing to relax and clear your mind.
  Relaxation techniques are good for your heart, but don’t forget that these practices are not replacements for preventive exams or medication. Before beginning a new activity program, talk with your primary care provider for guidance on keeping your heart healthy.

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