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Looking to Improve your Heart Health? Reduce your Stress!

According to the American Heart Association (AHA), more than 1 in 3 women has a form of cardiovascular disease. And, heart disease is the leading cause of hospital stays for men in the United States. Due to the prevalence of the disease, the AHA recognizes each February as American Heart Month in hopes of raising awareness about the disease and how to prevent it.

Stress and Heart Health

While there are risk factors that contribute to heart disease that you can't control, there are many things you can do to maintain your heart health. One of those things is to reduce your stress. When stress is excessive, it can contribute to a host of health problems, including high blood pressure. If high blood pressure goes untreated, it can result in heart disease.

Reducing Your Stress

Taking steps to reduce your stress will improve your overall health. Try these tips:

- ♥ Plan and prioritize your most important responsibilities.
- ♥ Listen to relaxing music to help you calm down.
- ♥ Take time off from work to clear your mind.
- ♥ Exercise regularly to get your blood and endorphins flowing.

When to Seek Help

If the stresses in your life become more than you can bear or manage with these simple techniques, consider seeking professional assistance. A knowledgeable professional will be able to work with you to devise time management skills and stress-reducing techniques.

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Keep Your Heart Healthy Through Exercise

Did you know that exercising regularly could help you fight off chronic conditions and diseases? Exercise can help control your blood pressure, blood sugar and weight, raise your “good” cholesterol, and prevent diseases such as cancer, Type 2 diabetes and heart disease. According to the AHA, you should do these three exercises to improve your heart health:

- ♥ **Aerobic activity:** Get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (e.g., briskly walking) or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity (e.g., running) every week.
- ♥ **Muscle strengthening:** Incorporate muscle-strengthening exercises at least two days a week. For the purposes of general training, focus on two to three upper body and lower body exercises. Abdominal exercises are an important part of your training too.
- ♥ **Flexibility training:** Flexibility training is important too, but it is frequently neglected, resulting in increased tightness as you age and become less active.

Fast facts about your Heart

Over 750,000 Americans die each year due to heart disease. That's one death every 40 seconds.

Rally Survey — Gatekeeper!

Don't forget about our **gatekeeper!** ICUBA's Blue Rewards powered by Rally program lets you (and your covered spouse) earn up to \$250 in electronic gift cards — but you must get past the gatekeeper and be sure to complete your Rally Survey.

What you need to do:

1. First, log in to your My Health Toolkit® account from the SSO section at <http://ICUBAbenefits.org> or for participating spouses by visiting www.MyHealthToolkitFL.com. Then, log in to Rally.
2. Under your **Profile**, complete the Rally Survey to gain access to pending incentives.
3. Within Rally, choose and redeem any gift cards you've earned by the end of the plan year (deadline 03/31/2019).

After completion of this survey, you may redeem your rewards for program activities such as getting a physical exam, a biometric screening or a mammogram/PSA, as applicable.

Who loves ya?

February is International Boost Your Self-esteem Month. There's no better time to start seeing yourself in a brighter light.

Self-esteem begins in early childhood. At first, it's based on how adults in your life respond to you. Do they soothe you when you cry? Encourage you when you try something new? Their reactions help shape your sense of self-worth.

Increasing your self-esteem

Many people have low self-esteem. Luckily, it's not set in stone. You can improve it at any time. Do you know how?

1. **Pay attention to your self-talk.** We all talk to ourselves. What's your style? Do you give yourself positive messages? Or put yourself down? Do you think things like “What's wrong with me?” or “How could I be so stupid?” As you become aware, you can change negative self-talk.
 - ♥ Begin to notice achievements and tell yourself “Nice job!”
 - ♥ Reduce self-criticism because it's discouraging — not motivating.
2. **Pay attention to your strengths.** It's easy to pick out flaws. Why not notice how you shine? Are you handy, a good friend, a caring pet owner, funny or loving? Give yourself credit for all your big and little assets.
3. **Pay attention to your own needs.** Self-care shows how much you value yourself. Take care of your diet, fitness and emotional needs. You can't be “there” for others if you're not “there” for yourself.

Practice these steps to build up self-esteem. It takes awareness and repetition of new habits to improve self-esteem. And you can do it!



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