

# HEALTH STATION: THE 411

By Linda Dark

How many Readers out there were lucky enough to find, and buy that latest Sony Play Station for Christmas? For those who did, how many hours have you spent so far enjoying that new "toy"?

Well, this new contributing column will show how to share just a little of that time on a special issue: your Health! When you have a reasonable portion of good health, you have everything! {This is for information only and does not replace any professional advice / recommendations of your primary physician}

## February is Heart Month

What is the biggest killer of adults in the U.S.? Lung cancer? Breast cancer? Prostate cancer?

Diseases of the heart and blood vessels – "cardiovascular diseases" – are STILL the leading cause of death in this country, and in North Carolina. (Stroke is third behind cancer).

On February 14, while we are all eagerly awaiting the flowers, the chocolates, or some bling-bling, let's remember to devote at least a couple of days in February to showing some love for our hearts too – that is, the "real" heart that beats and pushes our blood around!

The heart is a muscle that pumps blood with oxygen to all our organs; and then pumps the de-oxygenated blood back to the lungs. It's about the size of a fist. If the heart stops pumping well, various health problems will begin. Also, if the blood vessels become narrower than normal, high blood pressure (hypertension) can result, which can eventually do damage (dangerous levels of blood pressure can lead to stroke). High blood pressure is more likely if it runs in your family.

According to the American Heart Association's 2006 annual report (Dec. 29), there are several risk factors but two are big: (1) bad nutrition and (2) increasing obesity. This report was created by a team of health care experts, led by Dr. Wayne Rosamond, a UNC scientist.

Statistics show that 36% of all deaths nationally are due to cardiovascular illness. In North Carolina the two main causes of death are heart disease and cancer. Thinking of the future and our children, we need to be concerned for them as well. The AHA report showed:

**"For children 12 to 19 years old, 17% were overweight in 2001-2004". This was up from just 6% overweight children in 1971-74.**

Various news media report frequently that diabetes is on the rise, even for children and teens, and increasing weight / lack of exercise are some of the factors. So . . . . .how can we begin to get healthier? There are some easy steps:

Very little cost, very little pain – you'll still have some gain!

As the saying goes, "let there be a (health) revival and let it begin with me". (You should always check with your doctor before making changes, especially if you are taking prescription medicines.)

First, the word "dieting" should be dropped: instead, "Eat for Life". We want to take small steps to better nutrition that will last, rather than getting hung up on the most recent fad.

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Remember, these tips are the same things our grandmothers and grandfathers told us back in the day, and they also showed us by their positive example:

- Increase physical activity - Park a distance away from the store or job so that you have to walk longer; 1-2 times a week (to begin), take steps instead of an elevator; Walk to a neighbor's after dinner / show off those Valentine gifts!
  - Increase fruits / vegetables (strive for 5-7 servings)
- Switch to fruit juice instead of punch/soda – that can cut out 40-140 calories per can or bottle of soda (it's mostly sugar); an 8oz bottle of soda may have up to 250 calories; Cut up raw vegetables that you like – car-

rots, celery, cukes, tomatoes, peppers and refrigerate – you are more likely to eat them if already handy and ready;

- Fill a pitcher with water early in the day, either tap or bottled. Add slice of lemon or lime – again it is ready for drinking. This can be done at home or work. You might inspire a co-worker!
  - Low fat or light margarine eliminates about 50 calories per tablespoon; butter has 100 calories per tablespoon and 30mg of cholesterol.
  - Change to 2% milk (120 calories) instead of whole milk (160).
- Later, after your taste has adjusted, you can switch to 1% milk (100). For those who want to add soy, start with half 2% milk and half soy – the taste will be more similar. Soy is believed to have many health benefits, especially for women. {Caution: growing children need whole milk unless your doctor has recommended differently}.
- Whatever you do to combat stress: music, dancing, a concert, catching "Dream Girls" on the Big Screen, riding your Harley: a Just Do It! But guard against those costly shopping sprees (we want to be healthier and wealthier).

Most important: simply choose 1-2 things that you will do TODAY; stay with it for three weeks. Then begin to think about one other desired change; try that for another three weeks. It is easier to develop one or two new habits over time, rather than trying to do everything at once.

Being healthier can save you money, too. How?

- if you are healthier, you may need fewer visits to your doctor
- less medicines may lead to fewer co-pays
- if you can use generic (non-brand) medicines, they are less expensive but your physician will have to decide if it is safe for you
- smaller doses may lead to fewer side effects, and less money spent to treat those potential effects
- reports show that healthy workers spend less time off for sick days, thus saving paid-time-off for vacations, not illnesses.

Let us know what changes you will choose to try and whether it works for you.....

**E mail: Lsdark@hotmail.com >>attention >> "The HealthStation"**



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