STEP BY STEP

By: Earlene Gleisner, RN, for Avenues to Wellness

For many, the term heart disease brings to mind only one kind of episode, that being the ‘heart attack.’ There are many other conditions that can be listed under this general term, such as Coronary Heart Disease, Enlarged Heart, Irregular Heart Rhythm, Atrial Fibrillation, Heart Valve Disease, Pericarditis, and many more. With so many different kinds of diseases for the heart, it is easy to understand why, according to a study by Heron & Smith, from a National Vital Statistics Report, the leading cause of death for men and women over the age of 65 is Heart Disease. This is true across the board for the white population as well as African Americans, Asian and Pacific Islanders, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and Hispanics.

Lowering our risk for heart disease is more than decreasing our cholesterol level. Current medical advice is now including the philosophy of decreasing what is called the “inflammatory” cause of heart disease. This may mean taking medication but it also includes making some life style changes. If you are a smoker, you are advised to stop. If you are a diabetic, you are advised to manage your blood sugar. Other substances to remove from your diet are Trans and unsaturated fats and high fructose corn syrup as well as refined sugar.

“Exercise is the single most important thing you can do for your heart and your overall health,” said David Ploss, MD, FACC, in his ATW talk, Feb 2, at the Senior Center.  Getting active (such as walking 20 minutes a day) can decrease cholesterol and the progressive rate of diabetes, and, mostly importantly, the likelihood of a coronary event, such as a heart attack. Exercise can relieve depression, delay dementia, increase longevity by 23%, reduce the possibility of hip fracture by 41%, and generally improve your quality of life.

Having a buddy helps. Find a friend who wants to join you in getting healthy. You can encourage each other to reach your goals.

ATW will be sponsoring the second ‘Healthier Living’ workshop this spring, and will include strategies to reduce pain, fatigue, stress, anxiety, and sleep loss. Please watch for dates of this free six-week course or contact ATW at the email address listed below.

This month’s challenge: We all go shopping. Make the decision to park your car far away from the store. It’s an easy way to add steps and minutes of walking to your exercise regime. Even if you are in a rush, you can challenge yourself to walk faster which offers you the cardiac exercise you are seeking so as to keep your heart healthy. Carry a few items to increase the level of exercise.

Avenues To Wellness was created especially for Inland Mendocino County by the Frank R. Howard Foundation. Visit [www.avenuestowellness.org](http://www.avenuestowellness.org/) , or email[atwforhealth@gmail.com](mailto:atwforhealth@gmail.com) for more information.