WHAT ARE ANTIOXIDANTS?

Antioxidants help protect the body against free radicals-unstable molecules that can damage cells and cause cancer. A number of antioxidants are found in food while others are synthesized in the body. Many antioxidants come in the form of vitamins, such as vitamins A, C, and E, while others are phytonutrients, such as lycopene, beta-carotene, lutein, and selenium. Whole foods, such as fruits, veggies, nuts, and grains, are among the best sources of antioxidants.

WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN “PREBIOTICS” AND “PROBIOTICS”?

Prebiotics are nondigestible foods that help feed beneficial bacteria (including probiotics) in the intestinal tract. The most beneficial prebiotics are carbohydrate fibers called oligosaccharides, which are found in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes.

Probiotic means “life-supporting”, and these beneficial bacteria help improve overall health. Sufficient amounts of beneficial bacteria in the intestines are necessary to maintain a healthy immune system and to aid digestion. Probiotics can be useful in treating intestinal disorders, protecting against candida infection, and reducing lactose in dairy products for those who have lactose intolerance. Bacteria such as Lactobacillus bulgaricus, L. acidophilus and Streptococcus thermophiles are used to make yogurt and other fermented foods.
February is American Heart Month: Are You at Risk for Heart Disease?

Cardiovascular disease (CVD)—including heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure—is the number 1 killer of women and men in the United States. It is a leading cause of disability, preventing Americans from working and enjoying family activities. CVD costs the United States over $300 billion each year, including the cost of health care services, medications, and lost productivity.

Understanding the Burden of CVD

CVD does not affect all groups of people in the same way. Although the number of preventable deaths has declined in people aged 65 to 74 years, it has remained unchanged in people under age 65. Men are more than twice as likely as women to die from preventable CVD.

Having a close relative who has heart disease puts you at higher risk for CVD. Health disparities based on geography also exist. During 2007–2009, death rates due to heart disease were the highest in the South and lowest in the West.

Race and ethnicity also affect your risk. Nearly 44% of African American men and 48% of African American women have some form of CVD. And African Americans are more likely than any other racial or ethnic group to have high blood pressure and to develop the condition earlier in life. About 2 in 5 African American adults have high blood pressure, yet fewer than half of them have the condition under control.

Many CVD deaths could have been prevented through healthier habits, healthier living spaces, and better management of conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes.

Take It One Step at a Time

You can control a number of risk factors for CVD, including: diet, physical activity, tobacco use, obesity, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes.

Plan for Prevention

Work with your health care team. Get a checkup at least once each year, even if you feel healthy. A doctor, nurse, or other health care professional can check for conditions that put you at risk for CVD, such as high blood pressure and diabetes—conditions that can go unnoticed for too long.

Monitor your blood pressure. High blood pressure often has no symptoms, so be sure to have it checked on a regular basis. You can check your blood pressure at home, at a pharmacy, or at a doctor’s office.

Get your cholesterol checked. Your health care team should test your cholesterol levels at least once every 5 years. Talk with your health care professional about this simple blood test.

Eat a healthy diet. Choosing healthful meal and snack options can help you avoid CVD and its complications. Limiting sodium in your diet can lower your blood pressure. Be sure to eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables—adults should have at least five servings each day. Eating foods low in saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol and high in fiber.

Maintain a healthy weight.

Exercise regularly. Physical activity can help you maintain a healthy weight and lower cholesterol and blood pressure. The Surgeon General recommends that adults should engage in moderate-intensity activity for at least 150 minutes per week. Remember to incorporate exercise into your day in different ways: take the stairs instead of the elevator, or rake the yard instead of using the leaf blower. Exercising with friends and family can be a great way to stay healthy and have fun.

Don't smoke. Cigarette smoking greatly increases your risk for CVD. If you don't smoke, don't start. If you do smoke, quit as soon as possible. Limit alcohol use. Avoid drinking too much alcohol, which can increase your blood pressure. Men should stick to no more than two drinks per day, and women to no more than one. For more information, visit CDC's Alcohol and Public Health Web site.

Manage your diabetes. If you have diabetes, monitor your blood sugar levels closely, and talk with your health care team about treatment options. Visit CDC's Diabetes Public Health Resource for more information.

Take your medicine. If you're taking medication to treat high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, or another condition, follow the instructions carefully. Always ask questions if you don't understand something. If you have side effects, talk with your health care team about your options.

References
