

# 2008 February



## Be Heart Healthy

With the stroke of a pen, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed a declaration proclaiming February 1964 American Heart Month. At the time, Johnson declared that “diseases of the heart and circulatory system” were responsible for more than half the deaths that occurred annually.<sup>1</sup>

Today, more than four decades later, February is still designated each year as American Heart Month. Heart disease is now considered the leading cause of death in the United States, with almost 700,000 Americans dying of heart disease each year – about 29 percent of all U.S. deaths.<sup>2</sup>

The good news, however, is that while some conditions and lifestyle factors can increase a person’s risk for heart disease, there are things you can do to help decrease that risk, including:

- **Avoid smoking.** Any tobacco product is bad for your heart.
- **Be physically active.** Even a little bit of exercise helps. If you can do something on a daily basis, all the better.
- **Maintain a healthy diet and weight.** Good nutrition is essential to a healthy lifestyle. Obesity increases the risk of other diseases and conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, which in turn increases the risk of heart disease.
- **Reduce cholesterol levels.** Maintain a diet that’s low in saturated fat and cholesterol and high in fiber. Physicians may prescribe medication to help control cholesterol levels.
- **Lower high blood pressure.** Maintaining a healthy diet, exercising and avoiding tobacco products can help to keep blood pressure low. Physicians may prescribe medication to help control blood pressure level.
- **Manage other health conditions.** People who have certain health conditions, such as diabetes, have an increased risk of heart disease.
- **Limit alcohol intake.** Drink in moderation.



Knowing your family’s medical history is also important, since heart disease – or the factors that can increase the risk for heart disease – can run in families.

American Heart Month isn’t just a name; it’s a reminder to commit to a heart-healthy lifestyle.

1. The American Presidency Project. Proclamation 3566 - American Heart Month, 1964. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=75180>. Accessed on December 17, 2007.

2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Heart Disease. <http://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease>. Accessed on December 17, 2007.