February is American Heart Month!
All information taken from cdc.gov, mayoclinic.org and heart.org.

Learn about your risks for cardiovascular disease and preventive steps you can take to stay "heart-healthy".

Are You at Risk for Heart Disease?
The American Heart Association reports that 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.

CVD does not affect all groups of people in the same way. A study conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that 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. Here are six heart disease prevention tips to get you started.

Life Style Strategies to Prevent Heart Disease:

❤️ Eat a Heart-Healthy Diet: Eating a healthy diet can reduce your risk of heart disease.
   - Try heart-healthy diets like the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) plan and the Mediterranean diet.
   - Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, fish, and other low-fat sources of protein.
   - Limit the consumption of saturated fats to 10% of your daily calories and eliminate trans fats from your diet altogether.
   - Limit sodium and added sugar.
   - Consume alcohol in moderation.
Get Active: Physical activity helps you control your weight and can reduce your chances of developing other conditions that may put a strain on your heart, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes.

- The Surgeon General recommends that adults should engage in moderate-intensity activity for at least 150 minutes per week.
- Remember that you don’t have to exercise strenuously to achieve benefits. Activities, such as gardening, housekeeping, taking the stairs and walking the dog all count toward your total.

Maintain a Healthy Weight: Being overweight, especially if you carry excess weight around your middle, ups your risk of heart disease.

- Even a small weight loss can be beneficial. Reducing your weight by just 5 to 10 percent can help decrease your blood pressure, lower your blood cholesterol level and reduce your risk of diabetes.
- Target a body mass index (BMI) of less than 25.

Get Regular Health Screenings: High blood pressure and high cholesterol can damage your heart and blood vessels. Regular screening can tell you what your numbers are and whether you need to take action.

- Blood Pressure-maintain below 120/80 mm Hg.
- Cholesterol Levels-strive for a total cholesterol below 200 mg/dL.
- Aim for a fasting glucose less than 100 mg/dL.

Get Enough Quality Sleep: Make sleep a priority. People who don't get enough sleep have a risk of obesity, high blood pressure, heart attack, diabetes and depression.

- Adults need 7-9 hours of good sleep each night.
- If you feel like you've been getting enough sleep, but you're still tired throughout the day, ask your doctor if you need to be evaluated for sleep apnea. Signs and symptoms of sleep apnea include snoring loudly; gasping for air during sleep; waking up several times during the night; waking up with a headache, sore throat or dry mouth; and memory or learning problems.

Live Smoke-Free: Smoking or using tobacco of any kind is one of the most significant risk factors for developing heart disease. Chemicals in tobacco can damage your heart and blood vessels, leading to narrowing of the arteries (atherosclerosis). Atherosclerosis can ultimately lead to a heart attack.

- Women who smoke and take birth control pills are at greater risk of having a heart attack or stroke than are those who don't do either because both smoking and taking birth control pills increase the risk of blood clots.
- The good news, though, is that when you quit smoking, your risk of heart disease drops almost to that of a non-smoker in about five years. And no matter how long or how much you smoked, you'll start reaping rewards as soon as you quit.