Heart Healthy

February is the month when we celebrate being “heart healthy.” In order to maintain a strong, healthy heart, you and your family need to be physically active. This month you and your family will learn about your heart rate and how working your heart in the “target” heart rate zone can improve your physical fitness and overall heart health. You and your family can take a brisk walk together and can monitor the changes in your heart rate to see how hard you should be working to get the maximum benefits for your heart.

Before you begin activity, you should take your resting heart rate, which should be between 60 and 80 beats per minute. You can get your resting heart rate by taking your pulse. This can be done by feeling the carotid arteries in the neck or the radial artery in your wrist, using your fingertips. Count how many pulses you feel in 15 seconds, and then multiply by 4 to get your heart rate per minute. For example, if my resting pulse was 17 beats in 15 seconds, I would multiply 17 x 4 to get a resting heart rate of 68 beats per minute.

Target heart rates let you measure your initial fitness level and monitor your progress in a fitness program. To see if you are working within your target heart rate zone, you should periodically check your pulse as you exercise. The target heart rate can be used for more vigorous activities like brisk walking and jogging. Below is a format for calculating your maximum heart rate and range for your target heart rate. You can also use an online calculator, like the one at www.mayoclinic.com.

As an example, if I am 40 years old, my maximum heart rate would be 220-40, which equals 180. My lower target heart rate would be 180 times .60, which equals 108. My upper target heart rate would equal 180 times .85, which equals 153. This means that my target heart rate zone is between 108 and 153. This means that during my workout, I would want my heart rate to remain in that zone to ensure the most benefits for my heart.

- 220 - your age = Maximum Heart Rate
- (.60) x your Maximum Heart Rate = Lower target heart rate
- (.85) x your Maximal Heart Rate = Upper target heart rate
- Calculate the last two numbers to identify your target heart range for exercising. Try to keep your heart beating at a rate between these numbers for at least 20 minutes to improve your cardiovascular system.
Exercising at more than your target heart rate will not do a lot to help your heart and could cause harm to your heart and lungs. Remember, if you are a new exerciser you should begin working at 60% of your maximum heart rate and slowly increase your intensity as you get into better shape. If you are exercising within your target heart rate, you should be sweaty, but still able to carry on a conversation. If you can’t talk, then you are probably working too hard. Take your pulse three times during your workout to see how hard you are working.

Your family walk should involve three phases:

1) 5 minute warm-up, to help loosen the muscles and increase heart and lung functioning
   • a warm up for a brisk walk could be walking at a slower pace

2) 20 or more minutes of working in your target heart rate zone

3) 5 minutes of cool down, to allow the body to relax and avoid dizziness and soreness.

After you complete your family walk you can answer the following questions. If you need extra room feel free to use an additional sheet of paper.

How hard did you feel you worked during your walk?
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______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Did you exceed your maximum heart rate at any time during your walk?
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What are some other activities that you already do or could do in order to work in your target heart rate zone?
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