

In February we celebrate love...and healthy hearts!

Not only do **I ♥ YOU,**

Valentine's Day is just around the corner! The time of year when we celebrate love, and try to tend to matters of the heart. We express our heartfelt love, we share our hearts, we cut hearts out of construction paper, and we pledge our hearts. So, it is totally appropriate that February is also healthy heart month, when we are encouraged to tend to the health of our hearts, as well.

**I ♥ YOU!**  
*Healthy*

Nothing says "I love you" like taking steps to ensure that you can keep on loving and being loved for a long, long time. And staying young at heart means more than keeping things fun and passionate, it means keeping your heart functioning optimally so that there are lots and lots of years of Valentines, lots of quality time to share lives and share hearts.

While that may sound a bit mushy, it isn't overly dramatic. Heart disease continues to be the number 1 killer of both men and women in the United States, accounting for 1 out of every 4 deaths in the U.S. According to the CDC, Someone has a heart attack every 42 seconds, and each minute, in the United States, someone dies from a heart disease-related event.

Heart disease is a term that actually refers to several different heart conditions, but the most common type of heart disease is coronary artery disease, which is what causes heart attacks. Most of the time and for most people, the first sign or symptom of heart disease is chest discomfort or actually having a heart attack.

While a heart attack can seem sudden, heart disease actually develops over time, and is generally a result of a substance called plaque building up inside of the arteries. This causes the arteries to narrow, which reduces blood flow to the heart.

The good news is that heart disease can be detected, treated and prevented. The first step is to know your heart's status, which requires a visit to your physician, and usually some tests and blood work. The health fair blood draw clinics (in the fall in Evanston and in the spring for Bridger Valley) are a great way to get important lab work done for a low price. From there, a plan can be made to treat and improve the health of your heart, which will probably include treating high cholesterol, addressing high blood pressure, dealing with diabetes or pre-diabetes, and working on decreasing the other risk factors.

A doctor will need to help with treating the cholesterol, diabetes and blood pressure, which are three big risk factors for developing heart disease, but anyone can address the other risk factors at home. Smoking, eating an unhealthy diet, and not getting enough exercise all increase your risk for having heart disease.

Just taking the following small steps can make a big difference in your heart health: Have regular check-ups, even if you don't think you're sick; add exercise to your daily routine (walking is a great way to start); increase healthy eating; take steps to quit smoking; and take your medications as prescribed.

This month, the month when we celebrate love, is a great time to commit to a healthy lifestyle and make small changes that can lead to a lifetime of heart health. Just one of these actions could be the best Valentine's Day gift you've ever given!

If you have any questions or would like assistance in taking steps to a healthier heart, contact Public Health at 789-9203.