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Smart Ways to Be Sweet to Your Heart

Ah February! It's that sweet time of year when our thoughts turn to roses, romance, and chocolate hearts. American Heart Month is also a wonderful time to appreciate the daily beat of your own heart and to renew your personal commitment to the basics of a heart-smart lifestyle.

"February is a great month to discover how delicious and enjoyable healthy choices can be," says Crystelle Fogle, MS, RD, (registered dietitian), with the Montana Cardiovascular Health Program. "To celebrate Heart Month, hospitals, health departments, and fitness centers all across Montana will offer free and low-cost opportunities to learn the latest about nutrition and fitness for the whole family. Many groups will also feature screenings for stroke and heart disease risk factors, such as blood pressure and cholesterol levels."

The good news is that heart-smart choices are also effective in preventing stroke, diabetes, cancer, and other conditions. The basics are all the same: a nutrient-rich, low-fat eating style; 30 to 60 minutes of daily physical activity; maintaining a healthy weight for your body type; and not smoking. These same healthy habits will also help you feel your best and be more productive at both work and play.

As program manager for the Montana Cardiovascular Health Program, Fogle coordinates statewide efforts to prevent heart disease and stroke in a variety of settings, including worksites and healthcare. "Montana is fortunate to have top-notch hospital programs for people with cardiovascular disease. We also have many healthcare providers who donate time to educate people about preventing heart problems before they need medical intervention." Here are two Billings examples of educational Heart Month events:

- **Walk N Talk with the Doc:** For nearly four years, Dr. Cheryl Cook has been hosting free 30-minute walks, co-sponsored by St. Vincent Healthcare and MSU-B. Every Tuesday at 5:30 PM, walkers get a daily dose of activity and a chance to talk informally with experts about their health concerns. During Heart Month, the walks will feature cardiac physicians from Montana Heart Institute and Yellowstone Heart Center.
- **Heart-Smart Eating for a New Decade:** On February 4, 2010 at the Billings Clinic, Registered Dietitian Dayle Hayes and Sodexo Innovations Chef Mark Perez will *Stir Up a Tasty Rainbow of Health*. Attendees will enjoy a light stir-fry dinner and explore tasty, easy, nutrient-rich food choices for every meal. Other February events include presentations on exercise, stress reduction, and understanding risk factor numbers.

"For Heart Month programs in your community, check the newspaper and hospital websites," says Fogle. "If you live out of town or cannot attend events, there are many excellent resources available for free online and by phone. Here are three places to get the information and tools you need to be sweeter to your heart."

- **American Heart Association:** Life's Simple 7 (<http://mylifecheck.heart.org/>) focuses on small changes.
- **Montana Tobacco QUIT LINE:** Offers personalized free help to stop smoking at 1-800-QUIT-NOW.
- **Eat Right Montana:** Serves up monthly packets with helpful tips and delicious heart-healthy recipes for free download at www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm.