Heart Health: beyond eating vegetables and a brisk walk

## By Lacy Wolff, ERS Health Promotion Administrator

When we hear information about heart health, we often hear the dire warnings of heart disease, the world’s no. 1 killer. We are warned that behaviors like using tobacco, eating fried foods, and not moving enough can lead to an unhealthy heart. As a health educator and wellness coach for the past 20 years, I have learned that most of us know what good and bad health behavior looks like. But knowing and doing are different things.

## What we can’t see:

For a moment, just consider this miraculous beating object in the center of your chest. You can even put your hand over it and feel it beating in there, just working day after day, breath after breath for our entire lives. For the most part, we don’t even notice it’s there. Behavior is key:

Heart health has a genetic component, but research has shown that behavior is a much better indicator of how long our hearts will continue to work for us. The larger challenge with heart health is *seeing* that the tiny, day-to-day things that we do are impacting our heart. And, there is great news about heart health; the heart can heal, even if there is damage or blockage.

While nutrition and physical activity are both important, there is more to consider, including healthy relationships, managing stress, sleep, and other things that contribute to strong mental health. We cannot separate the mind from the body. At ERS, we want to take a whole-person, day-by-day approach when it comes to heart health. By helping our participants build healthy habits, these habits will support a long and productive life well into retirement.

The good news is, if you are interested in improving your health and well-being, you have resources to help you do that. Every person is unique and may need different things at different times. We want to support you wherever you are on your journey to good health. No shame, just a sincere desire to help you find the things you need to help you be your best self. Here are a few resources you may find beneficial if you want to improve your heart health.

* Take an online health assessment. This is a great way to gauge your current health status, your personal health behaviors, and goals. HealthSelect participants can learn how to access the online Health Assessment through this [video tutorial](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pZbM-Szygw&feature=youtu.be). HMO Participants can learn more through [this link](https://ers.texas.gov/Wellness-Resources-en/Wellness-Active).
* See your primary care physician for an annual physical at no cost to you. While we don’t always want to go to the doctor, this is an important aspect of good health. Find out your numbers, like your blood pressure cholesterol levels, and blood glucose levels.
* If you are a HealthSelect participant, enroll in one of [the virtual weight management programs.](https://healthselect.bcbstx.com/content/health-and-wellness-incentives/weight-management-programs). We have two incredible programs that focus on small steps, week after week, that add up to big change over time.
* Join us for our regularly scheduled webinars that focus on the many aspects of health: mental, physical, and emotional. See what’s next through our calendar: [ERS Wellness Calendar Link](https://ers.texas.gov/Event-Calendars/Wellness-Events)

If you have a success story that you would like to share, I’d love to have you as a guest on the Walk and Talk Podcast! Email me at lacy.wolff@ers.texas.gov