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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**February is American Heart Month.
Here are 10 Steps to Save Your Heart:**
Adapted By Lori Taylor, BS -- from Eating Well, June 2008.

1) Know Your Numbers - High cholesterol is linked with about one-third of heart disease cases worldwide, according to data from the United Nations. Your cholesterol (lipid profile) is made up of several readings: high-density cholesterol (HDL or "good" cholesterol), low-density cholesterol (LDL or "bad" cholesterol), and triglycerides (TG). High levels of "bad" cholesterol (LDL greater than 160 mg/dL or TG greater than 200 mg/dL), are considered risk factors for developing heart disease. Research shows that changing your diet for the better can help lower "bad" LDL and TG levels, as well as increase "good" HDL cholesterol, if they're out of healthy ranges. Talk with your doctor about a screening. Medications are sometimes needed.

2) Calculate Your Risk - Having multiple factors for heart disease increases your risk dramatically. For example, if you smoke, have high blood pressure, or high cholesterol, any one of these factors *doubles* your likelihood of developing heart disease in the next six years. But having all three increases your chance **eightfold!** The good news is treating any one of these risk factors effectively cuts your likelihood of developing heart disease in half.

3) Lose Weight If You Need To - Research suggests that by losing as little as 5% - 10% of your body weight you will have better blood pressure, lower risk for diabetes and improved cholesterol levels. Are you toting around too many pounds? Calculate your body mass index (BMI) at

www.eatingwell.com/heartinfo. A normal BMI is 18.5 to 24.9. A BMI of 25 to 29.9 is overweight and 30 and above is considered obese.

4) *Slash Your Intake of Saturated Fat* - Animal products (e.g. eggs, meat and dairy) are high in the saturated fats that elevate “bad” LDL cholesterol, leading to plaque buildup in the arteries of your heart. Limit saturated fats to 5% or less of your total calories. For example, try replacing butter with vegetable-based oils, particularly olive and canola oil, both of which contain good amounts of heart-healthy monounsaturated fats, and by trading higher-fat meats for lean poultry, fish and beans.

5) *Junk The Junk Food* - Many packaged snacks, crackers, bakery goods and some margarines contain artificial trans fats (known as hydrogenated oils), which increase “bad” LDL even more than saturated fats, according to recent research by Harvard School of Public Health. Read labels carefully: if a package claims “zero trans fat,” the amount per serving may be less than 0.5 g and could have been rounded down to zero. The only way to be sure you’re getting a product without trans fats is to avoid products that include “hydrogenated oil.”

6) *Fill Up On Fiber* - Various studies link a high-fiber diet with a lower risk of heart disease. Aim to include plenty of foods that are rich in *soluble* fiber, which can help lower “bad” LDL. Foods high in soluble fiber include oatmeal, barley, beans, citrus fruits, okra and eggplant.

7) *Replace Refined Grains with Whole Ones* - Eating too many refined carbohydrates (e.g., white bread, pastries, donuts, white pasta) fuels the body’s ability to make triglycerides. What’s more, processed grains are quickly converted to glucose, which raises blood sugar levels and may predispose one to developing type 2 diabetes, another risk factor for heart disease. Choose whole grains, such as brown rice, whole grain breads and whole-wheat pastas, all of which contain more fiber and healthful fats than processed grains.

8) *Go Fish* - Consuming two or more servings of fish per week is associated with a 30% lower risk of developing coronary heart disease over the long term, studies show. Fish contain omega-3 fats, which lower levels of triglycerides in the blood that may contribute to blood clotting. Omega-3’s also lower blood

pressure slightly and can help prevent irregular heart rhythms. You can also find omega-3 fats in flaxseed oil, canola oil and walnuts.

9) Get Nuts - Research suggests that people who eat nuts – walnuts, pecans, almonds, hazelnuts, pistachios, pine nuts and peanuts (which actually are legumes) – at least two to four days per week have a lower incidence of heart disease than people who eat them less. All nuts contain good amounts of heart-healthy monounsaturated fats and low levels of saturated fats.

10) Enjoy Alcohol In Moderation - Scientific literature indicates that people who drink moderately (2 drinks/day for men, 1 drink/day for women) are less likely to have heart disease than those who abstain. Alcohol appears to raise “good” HDL cholesterol. Wine, in particular, “thins” the blood (making it less prone to clotting) and also contains antioxidants that prevent your arteries from taking up LDL cholesterol, a process that can lead to plaque buildup.

Remember, 1 drink equals 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine or 1.5 ounces of liquor.

For more information about keeping your heart healthy, visit www.americanheart.org or talk to your doctor about a healthy plan for you!

If you have any topics that you would like to see discussed in this column please call Maryanne at (603) 747-9189 or email maldrich@cottagehospital.org

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