Heart disease is the leading cause of unexpected death facing our country. It is often believed to be a “man’s disease,” but it affects equal numbers of men and women. Here are some sobering statistics from the American Heart Association:

- Heart disease claims about 1 million lives annually in the United States – more than AIDS and all cancers combined.
- Every 33 seconds someone in the United States dies from cardiovascular disease, which is roughly the equivalent of the September 11th tragedy repeating itself every 24 hours, 365 days a year!
- This year more than 920,000 Americans will have a heart attack and nearly half of them will occur without prior symptoms or warning signs. Half of the victims of sudden cardiac death are under 65.

In contrast to the U.S., Japan has one of the lowest incidences of heart disease, which is attributed, to a large extent, to a diet rich in Omega-3 fatty acids. This month in honor of February being “American Heart Month,” we will explore Omega-3s, why we need them and where to get them.

To your health,
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**Omega-3s**

**Why We Need Them and Where to Get Them**

I mentioned the Japanese diet already, but actually our understanding of Omega-3 fatty acids was influenced with a 1971 Danish Study published in The Lancet, which showed that Greenland Eskimos, thought often obese, had very low levels of heart disease. In fact coronary atherosclerosis was almost unknown to them and this was attributed to a diet very rich in Omega-3s through large amounts of fatty fish consumed.

A large number of studies have since shown that fish oil supplements in the form of EPA and DHA; lower triglycerides and blood pressure; and reduce the risk of death, heart attacks, and strokes; while slowing the buildup of atherosclerotic plaque.

An important factor to consider for a healthy heart is also the balance between Omega-3s and Omega-6s. Though there is certainly a health benefit to having both types of fats, studies suggest that a healthy ratio of 2:1 or 1:1 of Omega-6 to Omega-3 is what is highly desirable. Unfortunately, the Standard American Diet, which is heavy on seed and grain crops, also uses oils (sunflower, safflower, canola) that are 15:1 or even worse. Such a gross disproportion of Omega-6 versus Omega-3 is extremely inflammatory and can be disease forming.

Omega-3 is not a specific fat, but a group of three polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs). They are commonly known as ALA (alpha-linolenic acid), EPA (eicosapentanoic acid) and DHA (docosahexanoic acid).

The positive effects of ALA, while not as potent, have also been studied. Most experts recommend 600-1,000 milligrams of DHA a day and 1,000 milligrams of ALA.

ALA, is the form that is most commonly found in plant sources such as walnuts, flax and chia seeds. Our bodies actually have the capacity to convert ALA to EPA and then to DHA. The conversion rate depends on age, sex and the adequate supply of nutrients such as B and C vitamins, magnesium and zinc. Even in the presence of these nutrients, conversion is considered pretty inefficient. One study showed that 6% of ALA is converted to EPA and only about 3.8% is converted to DHA.

Fish oil, as mentioned earlier, is a great source of both EPA and DHA. A 6 ounce serving of salmon has 2,000 mg of these fats. When it comes to eating fish you want to avoid the top of the food chain fish like tuna, shark and swordfish, that will have the highest levels of mercury and opt for smaller fish such as salmon, sardines and herring.

Bottom line is, there are many options, so find one that works for you and help optimize your Omega-3 levels to enjoy a healthy heart for many years to come!
Sue had been struggling with a variety of health concerns for a long time, and over the last few years, her health had been on a rapid downward spiral. She was being treated for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high triglycerides, and an autoimmune disorder. Furthermore, her excess weight, constant fatigue, and gastrointestinal issues were adding to her feelings of despair and being overwhelmed.

Fast food, pizza, sweets, emotional eating and lack of exercise were all contributing daily to her aches and pains, and she knew that if she didn’t take control of her habits, she would experience serious consequences. At 71 years old, she told me “I am a very busy woman, and I needed to be healthy.”

Three years ago she started seeing Dr. Jamie Wright at Richland’s onsite clinic and began making a few changes to her diet. Signing up for a 12-week cardiometabolic program that was being piloted at her location, was finally what gave her the sense of accountability and reinforcement to stay on track. She started eating more fruits and veggies and smaller quantities of meat; eliminated sweets and dairy; minimized processed foods; and started exercising 3-5 times a week on her lunch hour.

The results Sue has experienced for her efforts are nothing short of life changing. She has lost 26 pounds, is completely off 4 medications and has halved her medication for her autoimmune condition that she has been on since 1967! She is thrilled for her new found energy and is extremely grateful to Dr. Wright and his team, who she says, is what she needed to get a handle on her life! She is also immensely thankful to Parker for making the preventive services available to everyone.

**Dark Chocolate Truffles**  
*By Dina Boyer*

**Ingredients**
- 1 ½ cups of pitted medjool dates
- ½ cup unsweetened shredded coconut
- ½ cup nuts
- ½ cup almond butter
- ¼ cup cacao powder
- 2 tbsp coconut oil

Optional: raw, dark chocolate bar and 1 tsp coconut oil

**Directions:**
1. Put all ingredients in a food processor and blend until smooth.
2. Take 1 tablespoon of mixture at a time and roll into a ball. Place all truffles in freezer for 30 min- 60 min.
3. You can enjoy any time or go one more step and dip each truffle in dark chocolate. (place one raw, dark melted chocolate bar with 1 tsp of coconut oil in a stainless steel bowl and place the bowl over a pot of simmering water to melt the chocolate. Dip each truffle in the chocolate one at a time and place on parchment paper to cool. Makes 15-20 truffles

**Nutrition (per truffle):** 123 cal, 8.6 g fat, 2.7 g of sat. fat, 12.6 g Carbs., 2.2 g Protein, 4 mg Sodium, 2.3g Fiber.

**Questions & Answers**

Q: What are some alternative Omega-3 sources to fish oil?
A: One alternative option for fish oil that is still high in EPA and DHA is Krill oil. Krill are tiny shrimplike crustaceans that are extremely rich in both EPA and DHA. Studies show that Omega-3 from Krill oil is more bioavailable than that found in fish.

Supplements providing both DHA and EPA from Algae are another great option for vegans and vegetarians. Chia seeds contain the highest source of plant based Omega-3 (ALA). Their oil contains more than 60% Omega-3 and 20% Omega-6. Flax seeds and walnuts are yet another dietary source of Omega-3s in the form of ALA. If you opt for flaxseed, it is important to eat it ground, as the whole flaxseeds are too hard to digest and will go through your system undigested. I like to buy whole and grind it at home to prevent buying a rancid product. Always refrigerate or freeze once ground to preserve the quality of the Omega-3s.