Make time to care for your health

A note from Total Woman Coordinator, Lisa Hastings, RN, BSN, MHA

We as women tend to neglect ourselves in the midst of caring for others. It is easy to use excuses and not make the changes necessary to take action and care for ourselves. Taking small steps to better health and wellness will make us feel better not only physically, but also emotionally. By making simple, daily changes, you can see the positive impact it has on your health.

You can take control of your health by eating nutritiously, getting more exercise and regular checkups with your primary care provider and paying attention to their recommendations, avoid smoking, reducing stress and getting sufficient rest. When we take care of ourselves, we will feel renewed and recharged. Take action today and put your health first.

Try new flavors during National Nutrition Month

Every March, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics celebrates National Nutrition Month®. This year’s theme encourages everyone to “Enjoy the Taste of Eating Right.” The taste of food motivates us to want to eat; the better food tastes, the more likely we are to eat it again.

The theme for National Nutrition Month® encourages people to expand their experiences with taste and try new and bold flavors with nutritious foods, adding pleasure back into foods. Often people buy and prepare the same foods each week, creating a dull experience for mealtimes. However, there are many new foods and flavors waiting to be discovered.

Heather Venoy, registered dietitian with the Joslin Diabetes Center education affiliate at St. Mary’s, offers some ideas on how to enjoy the taste of foods.

NEW FOODS: Set a goal this month to try something new each week. Go down the produce aisle and find a fruit or vegetable you have never tried before and buy one or two. If you enjoy cheese, go to the deli and find a new cheese flavor and try that for a snack. Maybe you have never tried rye bread, so purchase a loaf and give it try. Expand your selection each week and you will be surprised by what you may find you love.

NEW FLAVORS: Enjoy herbs and spices. Seasonings can change the way a food tastes. They can take a bland food and make it explode with flavor. Avoid seasonings that have “salt” in the label like “garlic salt.” Instead, go with regular garlic. Be willing to experiment and you will be surprised by how much flavor food can have with just a few added ingredients.

NEW RECIPES: The Internet can open a whole new experience for cooking. To help you step out of your comfort zone, go the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics website at www.eatright.org for recipes and additional ideas on how you can enjoy “The Taste of Eating Right.”

“I encourage you to evaluate your plate this month and I challenge you to eat more nutritious foods,” Venoy said. “Making wise food choices for you and your family now will help you avoid chronic diseases such as diabetes. Type II diabetes is a growing epidemic, but it can be controlled with knowledge and modifications to health behaviors, such as the foods you eat.”

March 25 is the American Diabetes Association “Alert Day” for diabetes. On this day, you can answer some simple questions at www.diabetes.org to see if you are at risk for diabetes.

Venoy offers nutrition counseling to people with diabetes and other chronic illnesses, as well as those who want to gain a better understanding of how to make healthier meal choices and enjoy “The Taste of Eating Right.”

For more information, contact the Joslin Diabetes Center at St. Mary’s Medical Center at (304) 526-8363.
Are you at a high risk for diabetes?

Today, there are approximately 57 million people in the United States with pre-diabetes, a condition that raises a person’s risk for developing type II diabetes, heart disease, and stroke; could you be one of them? Healthy lifestyle habits are key to delaying or preventing type 2 diabetes from happening to you. Diabetes is a chronic condition in which your body either does not produce enough insulin, or it does not use insulin properly.

**Pre-Diabetes: Are You Already in the Danger Zone?**

Pre-diabetes commonly has no signs or symptoms. Take action to decrease your risk:

- Know your fasting glucose number. The normal range is 60 - 100 mg/dL. The American Diabetes Association recommends routine blood glucose screenings for everyone, starting at age 45.
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight. It is particularly important to reduce excess abdominal fat (apple-shaped bodies are at increased risk)
- Increase your physical activity
- Manage your blood pressure, cholesterol, and triglyceride levels

The following factors can increase your risk. The more factors that apply to you, the higher your risk:

- Age 45 or older
- Family history of pre-diabetes or diabetes
- Hispanic, African-American, Asian-American or Indian-American heritage
- Gestational diabetes (or delivered a baby weighing more than nine pounds)

### Steps to Prevent Diabetes

- Discuss any symptoms and review both your personal and family medical history with your doctor
- Follow a balanced, nutritious diet
- Exercise for 30 minutes most days
- Lose weight and maintain a healthy weight for your body
- Stop smoking

If you already have diabetes, the same preventive measures will also help you manage your diabetes and reduce your risk of health complications down the road.

### Warning Signs

Watch for “red flags” that warn you may have diabetes: increased thirst, unexplained weight loss, slow-healing sores, frequent urination, fatigue, frequent infections, extreme hunger, blurred vision and itchy skin.

#### Quit smoking for a healthier, happier life

Did you know that cigarette smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States? One out of every five deaths are caused by cigarette smoke each year.

Over time, the known effects of smoking have inspired a radical increase in smoking cessation. Yet there is still an allure surrounding smoking that continues to capture the attention of American teenagers, of which 20 percent are considered current cigarette smokers.

No matter what your age or how long you’ve been smoking, smoking cessation is a battle you can begin today to ensure a longer and healthier life. The American Cancer Society has proven time and time again that ex-smokers enjoy a higher quality of life and well-being, with improved overall immunity, as well as reduced rates of bronchitis and pneumonia. Smoking is NOT hot, so take a stand and make the choice to QUIT.

For more information on smoking cessation, call St. Mary’s Pulmonary Rehabilitation department at (304) 526-4755.