



MAKE EVERY DAY HEART HEALTHY DAY!



February is American Heart Month. It is a time to focus on heart health.

According to the American Heart Association, a healthy lifestyle can prevent heart disease [i] This includes healthy meals and snacks, plenty of fruits and vegetables, and regular physical activity.

Emerging research shows that positive thoughts and feelings are also associated with reducing the risk of heart disease [ii].

Consider the following exercises to create a ripple effect of positive, heart-warming vibes, serving your heart and the heart of others.

WHAT'S GOING WELL?

When was the last time someone asked you (or you asked someone) “What’s going well?” Usually, people just ask “How are you?”. The answer is often a quick “fine” or an explanation of something that is bothering you.

The instinct to focus on things that do not go well is called *negativity bias*. Humans are naturally wired to be sensitive and react to what is negative - it is a protective mechanism that ensures survival (think the fight, flight or freeze response). But too many negative thoughts and negative events can be overwhelming and affect mental and physical health.

Ask “**What’s going well?**” to focus on the positive things in life. This leads to positive thoughts, positive feelings, and maybe even a smile. Recalling positive events or feelings is like adding interest to your bank account. The more positivity in life, the greater resilience to future negative experiences [iii].

Through the Lens of Gratitude

1. First, make a list of everything you did yesterday (eg. woke up, brushed teeth, ate breakfast, went to work, etc.). Be as detailed as you like.
2. Next, make a new list of everything you did yesterday through the lens of gratitude (eg. woke up feeling happy to start the day, experienced the minty taste, fresh breath or clean mouth from brushed teeth, enjoyed breakfast with a family member, listened to a great podcast on the way to work, etc.).
3. What surprised you about the two lists? Was the first list about your actions and the second list about your feelings or interactions? Your gratitude was always there! Do you think you could use this approach to boost your positive emotions in your life? Even if things are not good, could there be good around them?

Try to do this exercise once or twice a week. Your heart may thank you!

- i. Arnett DK, Blumenthal RS, Albert MA, et al. 2019 ACC/AHA Guideline on the Primary Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease: A Report of the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association Task Force on Clinical Practice Guidelines. *J Am Coll Cardiol*. 2019;74(10):e177-e232. doi:10.1016/j.jacc.2019.03.010
- ii. Kubzansky LD, Huffman JC, Boehm JK, et al. Positive Psychological Well-Being and Cardiovascular Disease: JACC Health Promotion Series. *J Am Coll Cardiol*. 2018;72(12):1382-1396. doi:10.1016/j.jacc.2018.07.042
- iii. Fredrickson BL. The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci*. 2004;359(1449):1367-1378. doi:10.1098/rstb.2004.1512

