

February is Heart Disease Awareness Month.

Did you know that the lifestyle changes recommended for preventing heart disease are the same changes that can lower cancer risk? These are factors you can control: maintain a healthy weight, eat a healthy diet, exercise, and if you smoke - quit now.

The best way to find out your healthy weight is to monitor Body Mass Index, or BMI. Your BMI should be less than 25. The index calculation takes into consideration height and weight. There are many online resources that have Body Mass Index calculators or you can ask your healthcare provider to help you calculate your BMI. Being overweight can increase your risk of colon, breast, endometrial, esophageal, and kidney cancer. Being overweight also increases your risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, elevated triglycerides, and elevated cholesterol. Maintaining a healthy weight and eating a healthy diet go hand in hand. The best way to evaluate your diet is to write down everything you eat in a day. Better yet, monitor for a week to get a better overall look. A healthy daily diet should include at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables and 3 servings of whole grains. A healthy diet will help you control your weight, blood pressure and cholesterol. In addition, a healthy diet that includes the recommended servings of fruits, vegetables and whole grains can also lower your risk of lung, mouth, esophagus, stomach, and colon cancer. Being inactive is a major risk for heart disease. American Heart Association guidelines recommend 30 minutes of intentional moderate to vigorous physical activity a day. It can be difficult to get outside for exercise during a cold Wisconsin winter, but there are many indoor options. Join a gym or the YMCA, walk at the mall, use an exercise video, do chair exercises, or do all of the above. Be creative! Sometimes creativity and variation in activity is what keeps us motivated in the winter months. Check with your healthcare provider if you need some ideas that fit you. Being active can lower your cancer risk by influencing hormone levels and your immune system.

Want to decrease your risk of heart disease AND cancer? If you smoke - quit now, eat healthy, maintain a healthy weight, and exercise. These are all things that are in your control. Make it your Wisconsin winter challenge.