

February Healthy Hints

While February is the month we celebrate Valentine's Day, it is also the time to recognize heart health, dental health and the flu. These celebrations may not be romantic, but they are practical!

Matters of the Heart

Heart Health month recognizes the importance of heart healthy lifestyles. When you consider that the heart pumps 100,000 times a day, every day of your life, it is an organ that is well worth taking care of. While some risk factors like age, sex, race and family history cannot be changed, many risk factors can. Diet, high cholesterol, smoking, weight, stress and a sedentary lifestyle are risks that can be controlled. This is why it is so important for children to develop heart healthy habits at a young age.

Encourage healthy eating in your children. Fruits and vegetables are full of vitamins and minerals to fight cardiovascular disease. The kids will consume more produce when it is in plain sight or ready to eat in the refrigerator. Teach them the difference between "bad fats" that are solid at room temperature (butter, lard, fats from meat, creams) and heart healthy oils: walnuts, almonds, olive oil and olives. Serve low fat proteins - milk, chicken, lean beef and fish (omega-3 oils in some fish actually reduce your triglycerides). You can introduce skim or low fat milk gradually by mixing it with the whole milk.

Be active. Technology has made our lives easier...and more sedentary! It is recommended that children have 60 minutes of activity a day, adults at least 30 minutes. Replace some screen time with activity and teach your kids that being active doesn't mean you have to pant and sweat. Walk to school, take the stairs at the mall, park at the far reaches of a parking lot, help with yard work (my personal favorite!), or just play outside. It all adds up. It is true that not everyone is a competitive athlete, so it is important to remember that there are so many fun and active things to do off the sports fields. Cranford has the best treadmill in the area – the Nomahegan Park trails system! And when children *are* watching their favorite TV show, why not encourage them to dance during the commercials?

Help kids recognize stress and anxiety (stomach aches, headaches, extreme emotions, trouble sleeping, or eating) and encourage some down time or consider yoga. Kids love it.

A Reason to Smile

Dental health month celebrates healthy smiles. Good habits include flossing and brushing as soon as teeth appear. Help your kids brush twice a day and monitor them to be sure they have mastered the coordination to do the job on their own. Fluoride toothpaste is encouraged in children older than 6 years. Discourage sugary juices, drinks and snacks. If there is frequent snacking, kids should brush in between meals as well since snacks can lead to tooth decay. And, of course, see a dentist regularly as soon as the first teeth have erupted.

Flu Season

According to the NJ Department of Health, the flu has arrived in New Jersey and there is high incidence in all counties. So now is a good time to remind your families to wash their hands and cough into their sleeve. Also students should stay home if they are ill and until they are fever free for 24 hours without the use of medications. If you haven't been vaccinated, don't wait. The flu vaccine is recommended even during outbreaks. Brookside is taking measures to prevent the spread of the flu. Classrooms and common areas are cleaned and disinfected each night; desks, water fountains and door knobs are also wiped with disinfectants. Recess will be outside if weather permits to give the students the opportunity to enjoy fresh air and get much needed time out of the closed-in classrooms. Please dress your students accordingly.

Have a happy month of healthy celebrations!
~ Paula O'Hara, Brookside Place School Nurse