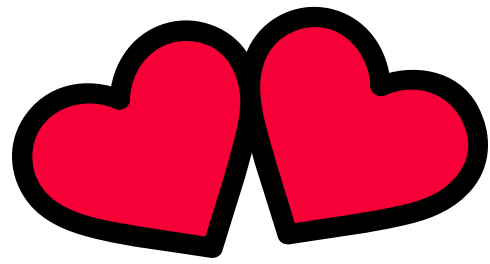# 10 Steps
to make 2016 a
Heart Health Year

1. Check your blood pressure regularly! Make a stop to the blood pressure machine part of your visit to the grocery store or pharmacy. If your blood pressure is above 120/80, make an appointment with your doctor.

2. Add a new physical activity to your routine. Start by walking for five or ten minutes at lunch, or take the stairs at work. Remember, making little changes slowly can lead to big results over time.

3. Leave the salt shaker on the counter and try some salt-free seasonings. Read nutrition labels and try to purchase low-sodium options of canned soups or frozen meals. A diet low in sodium has been proven to help reduce the risk of high blood pressure.

4. Drink more water. Staying hydrated is especially important during the hot summer months, when your heart has to work harder to cool you off. A 2002 study, building on a classic 1976 study, found that drinking five or more glasses of water a day decreased participants' chance of a heart attack by 62 percent for men and 39 percent for women!

5. Increase your physical activity. Try to gradually build your way from five to ten minutes a day to an hour a day. Did you know that for each hour of physical activity you do, you gain about two hours of additional life expectancy? That means that if you do an hour of physical activity every day for one year, it equals more than thirty days of potential life gained!

6. Visit your doctor for your yearly medical check-up. It's important to have your blood pressure, cholesterol levels, etc. monitored by a health professional once a year to make sure you are in good health. Remember, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

7. Replace soda with a non-sugary beverage. A 2012 Harvard University study found that sugary drinks increased a person's risk of chronic heart disease. Another study, published in 2011, found that sugary beverages raises a person's blood pressure, and it increases the more you drink. Even cutting back by one soda per day can decrease your blood pressure and improve your heart health.

8. If you smoke, QUIT! There are many programs, such as the Arizona Smoker's Hotline (ASHline), that provide FREE smoking cessation assistance. Quitting tobacco is extremely difficult, and it can take many tries (and outside help!) to stop for good--but it is one of the best things you can do for your heart health. Go to www.ashline.org or call 1-800-55-66-222 to speak with a Quit Coach.

9. Give yourself a break! Try to reduce your stress level. Too much stress may lead to high blood pressure (also known as hypertension) and high cholesterol, two of the factors that increase your risk of heart disease. Take ten or fifteen minutes each day to unwind—practice deep breathing techniques, meditate, take a bubble bath, listen to music, or read a book. Find what works for you!

10. Skip the fried food. Studies have shown an association between eating fried food and an increased risk of heart failure; in addition, fried food tends to be very high in calories, and eating too many calories can lead to obesity, high blood pressure, and heart disease.