

Lifestyle changes for teens critical in light of research about teens' heart disease risk

February 2 2010

Pamphlets detailing the warning signs associated with heart disease may soon end up in an unexpected location: your child's pediatrician's office. According to new research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one in five American teens has at least one risk factor for developing heart disease in adulthood.

With heart health front-and-center this month in honor of American Heart Month, most media coverage will focus on at-risk adults. But that's a mistake according to Sarah Wally, a dietitian with the National Association for Margarine Manufacturers.

"Although heart disease is typically diagnosed in adulthood, its roots often begin in childhood," says Wally. "Heart disease is the result of a lifelong process and intervention strategies to reduce risk should begin as early as possible."

The new CDC report, released earlier this year, highlights the need to intervene early. The report reveals that twenty percent of children and teens in the U.S. have an abnormal lipid profile - a sign of high triglycerides, low levels of [good cholesterol](#) or high levels of [bad cholesterol](#) - and a strong marker for future heart disease risk.

Small changes in daily habits are the key to helping young Americans modify their [risk of heart disease](#), according to Wally. "Incremental changes in diet and [exercise habits](#) are much more effective and successful over the long term," she says. "Something as simple as

swapping from butter to a soft spread margarine can have a lasting impact in improving the nutritional quality of your diet."

An easy substitution like using soft spread margarines (also known as buttery spreads) instead of butter over a week's time can cut an entire day's worth of [saturated fat](#), not to mention up to 40 calories per serving, Wally says. According to the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI), saturated fat raises blood cholesterol more than anything else. Eating less saturated fat can lower your blood cholesterol levels and reduce your risk for heart disease.

Switching to buttery spreads is also in keeping with expert advice to move toward a plant-based diet. Because they are made from healthy plant oils, buttery spreads have no cholesterol and significantly less saturated fat than butter, which is made from animal fat. It's a healthy change that is recommended by leading health groups, including the American Heart Association. The scientific literature also supports the change: One groundbreaking study, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, showed that making the simple switch from butter to soft margarine spreads lowered levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol by nine percent in children and eleven percent in adults.

Teens can find a myriad of opportunities to make similar healthful changes throughout the day to promote heart health. Switching from 2% to 1% milk, swapping out white bread in favor of whole grain, and finishing each meal with a serving of fruit are fast and easy ways to improve your diet. Similarly, incremental bursts of activity - even just 15 minutes in length - are a great way to reach a daily activity goal of 60 minutes on days when blocking-out a full hour is not feasible.

Provided by Kellen Communications

Citation: Lifestyle changes for teens critical in light of research about teens' heart disease risk (2010, February 2) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-02-lifestyle-teens-critical-heart-disease.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.