

Prevent heart disease one step and spoonful at a time

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During American Heart Month this February, Dr. John Glenn Tiu, a preventive cardiologist at the Pat and Jim Calhoun Cardiology Center, is encouraging everyone to take action to prevent heart disease and also talk with their doctor regarding their heart health.

"I encourage everyone to be proactive with their [heart health](#)," says Tiu,

"one step and one spoonful at a time."

Cardiovascular disease, including [heart attack](#) and stroke, is the leading cause of death in both men and women in the U.S. "It is important for everyone to know their risk of heart disease and what steps they can do to prevent it," says Tiu.

Consuming a heart [healthy diet](#), engaging in regular exercise and losing weight are key components to keeping our hearts in optimal shape. "Lifestyle changes remain the foundation of heart disease prevention," emphasizes Tiu.

Tiu recommends consuming a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, fish, whole grains and nuts as well as limiting intake of red meats and processed food. Diets such as the Mediterranean diet, the DASH diet and a plant-based diet have all been shown to be beneficial for heart health.

When Tiu meets a patient for the first time, his first question usually is "what do you do for physical activity or exercise?" He recommends at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise, such as brisk walking or bicycling, every day. "For patients who live a [sedentary lifestyle](#), I encourage them to start walking five to 10 minutes a day and go up from there," says Tiu.

After [lifestyle changes](#), the next step is to address potential issues including [high blood pressure](#), high cholesterol and diabetes. "These three common conditions, if not identified and managed properly, can increase your risk of heart disease," stresses Tiu. He recommends going to the doctor to have your blood pressure checked and to be screened for high cholesterol and diabetes with simple blood tests.

Tiu states that other factors that increase our risk of heart disease include:

- Family history of premature heart disease
- Kidney disease
- Premature menopause
- Inflammatory diseases such as psoriasis and rheumatoid arthritis

Your doctor or cardiologist can help put everything together and assess whether you are at low, intermediate or high risk of [heart disease](#) and develop a management plan that's right for you. In certain cases, advanced blood tests and tools such as calcium scoring can provide additional information to further refine your individual risk.

"I believe a holistic, patient-centered approach is key to meaningful and lasting changes," states Tiu, who joined the UConn Health faculty this past August after completing his fellowship training in cardiovascular diseases at UConn School of Medicine.

Provided by University of Connecticut

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