



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## This February, Practice Heart Health

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### Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

February is American Heart Month. It is the time when organizations place a special emphasis on raising awareness of heart disease—which is responsible for one in every four deaths—and what people can do to make their heart healthier.

According to the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the average age of an adult heart is actually seven years older than that person's actual age. It attributes that to risk factors such as smoking, diabetes, excessive weight and high blood pressure. Heart disease

has become the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States.

However, this alarming trend is not permanent and can actually be reversed with some changes to your daily routine. Here are some recommended tips for a heart healthy lifestyle:

**Improve your nutrition:** Foods rich in vitamins, minerals and nutrients can help fight heart disease. Experts say some of the best foods to eat for heart health include beets, kidney beans, red grapes, red potatoes, tomatoes, strawberries and tart cherries.

**Stop smoking:** Even a few cigarettes here and there can damage the heart. The good news is that for smokers who stop smoking, that damage can be repaired quickly.

**Get active:** Having a sedentary lifestyle has constantly been one of the top risk factors for heart disease and according to the American Heart Association, every year up to 250,000 deaths can be attributed to a lack of regular exercise. Physical activity not only strengthens your heart, it lowers your stress level too. Both are risk factors for heart attacks and stroke.

**Do not skip sleep:** Experts say getting seven to nine hours of sleep per night on a regular basis can lead to a healthier heart. Try to wake up and go to bed at the same times every day and night, even on your days off.

**Know the warning signs:** Understanding the warning signs for heart disease and taking action right away helps lessen the chance for permanent damage. Some of the most common are chest pain, shortness of breath, swelling in the legs, ankles or feet and persistent coughing or wheezing.

Although heart disease is the leading cause of death, the good news is that it can be prevented by making healthy lifestyle choices.