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Putting your heart first in 2017

Few things in life deserve as much tender-loving care as your heart

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If you already have a few New Year's resolutions in play, it's not too late to add a couple of heart health changes to the mix.

And no, we aren't talking about a new romantic resolution. Sorry, but you've already missed "Dating Sunday" this year.

But — let's bring it back to where it matters — that major muscle in your chest that pumps five quarts of blood per minute throughout the day, that's the most important one you should commit to taking care of this year.

If you don't know your numbers, those related to your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose (sugar) levels, it's

important you get familiar with them.

High blood pressure causes your heart to work harder and can cause the coronary arteries to become narrowed.

High cholesterol can cause plaque to develop in your arteries.

High blood glucose levels can damage nerves and blood vessels.

All of these factors raise your risk for developing heart disease and with it being the number one killer in the United States — accounting for one in seven deaths a year. It's important to know where you stand.

Once you know your numbers, you can understand your risk for developing heart disease and work together with your medical team on ways to reduce it.

"While heart disease is a pervasive and deadly threat, the good news is that

80 percent of heart disease and stroke can be prevented through education of your risks and lifestyle changes," says Sue Nordstrom, cardiac rehabilitation coordinator at Sturdy Memorial Hospital.

To focus on heart disease prevention, work to improve your diet and commit to getting more exercise.

Aim to incorporate more fruits, vegetables, whole beans and fish into your diet while limiting the amount of saturated and trans-fat you consume.

When planning your workouts, strive for at least 30 minutes of exercise five days a week.

Try to do your strength training before your cardio as it can help reduce your blood glucose levels.

HEART: Take care of No. 1

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If you smoke, it's time to quit. The chemicals in tobacco can damage your heart and blood vessels, not to mention that smoking raises your blood pressure and heart rate.

If you would like to learn more from the professionals in cardiac rehabilitation at Sturdy Memorial Hospital, register for the Heart Health Fair being held on from 7-10:30 a.m., Friday, Feb. 3, in conference rooms A, B, and C.

This fair affords you the opportunity to have your blood pressure measured, partake in risk factor assessments and stroke screenings.

In addition, those who register in advance have the opportunity to have glucose and cholesterol testing done, which requires a fasting period of at least 12 hours.

To register and for more information, contact Sturdy's information desk at 508-236-8555.