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Living Well

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Love Your Heart

February has been designated as American Heart Month. This national observance raises awareness about the risks of heart disease and lifestyle changes that can reduce cardiovascular risks and promote healthy hearts. As we celebrate love, kindness, and caring this month, what better time to improve your own heart health or encourage loved ones to improve theirs by quitting smoking?

Approximately 130,000 cardiovascular disease deaths per year as well as about 26% of heart attacks and 12-19% of strokes in the United States can be attributed to smoking. The Surgeon General has concluded that cigarette smoking greatly increases one's risk for heart disease. Therefore, being smoke-free and eliminating exposure to secondhand smoke is important to heart health.

When individuals smoke or are exposed to secondhand smoke, the cells that line the body's blood vessels react to the poisons in tobacco smoke almost immediately. Blood vessels narrow and there is an increase in heart rate and blood pressure. Chemical changes caused by tobacco smoke can also make blood more likely to clot and clots can form and block blood flow to your heart.

You can gain years of life by quitting smoking. The risk for a heart attack drops sharply just one year after you quit smoking. In fact, even if you have already had a heart attack, you can cut your risk of having another one by a third to a half if you quit smoking. Additionally, because secondhand smoke affects others and can increase their risk for heart attack and death, quitting smoking can help protect your loved ones.

I would encourage you to make an effort during National Heart Month to stop smoking or to encourage your loved ones to stop smoking. For free support and advice on quitting smoking, contact the Kansas Tobacco Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW or at www.QuitNow.net/Kansas. Additional information can also be obtained by contacting the Flint Hills Extension office in Council Grove at (620) 767-5136 or the office in Cottonwood Falls at (620) 273-6491.

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