



## The Heart of the Matter – February, 2017

February is known as National Heart Health Month. It's easy to get caught up in the frenzied quest to get the perfect gift to convey our love to those special people in our lives. While it may be nice to give (and receive) a box of chocolates, flowers, or jewelry, an even greater show of love is to help those close to us to be heart healthy.

The heart is an amazing organ. It forms as early as three weeks after conception, and the National Institute of Health estimates that the heart will beat 3 billion times in an average human lifetime as it pumps blood through the network of arteries and veins in the body. With heart disease being among the leading causes of death for men and women in the United States, it makes sense to know some of the foods that improve heart health.

Tomatoes are high in lycopene. The Harvard Medical School states that lycopene is a powerful antioxidant that eliminates dangerous free radicals that can damage DNA and other fragile cell structures. A recent study published in the journal, *Neurology*, links lycopene levels in the blood to reducing the risk of a stroke. Among the most common causes of stroke are due to blood clots. Fortunately, healthy lycopene levels in the body protects against strokes caused by blood clots, the most common kind of stroke. One important factor to keep in mind when considering lycopene consumption is that it is absorbed better in the body when it's combined with some type of fat, according to researchers at the Harvard School of Medicine. For example, adding a healthy oil in tomato

sauce makes for a great environment for lycopene absorption.

When searching for foods with lycopene, remember that lycopene gives fruits and vegetables a brilliant orange, red, or yellow coloring.

Foods high in fiber are also effective in promoting heart health. High-fiber foods include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and beans. Oily fish (salmon, trout, and mackerel) should be a regular part of your diet as they help lower the risk of the onset of heart disease.

In addition to eating the right foods, keep in mind that an active lifestyle that includes regular exercise is also beneficial as part of a routine to improve or maintain heart health.



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## *Local Events*

- “Fresh Start to a Healthier You”
  - Thursday, February 9
  - 8:30 a.m.
  - Early Childhood Learning Center
- Together in Texas Marriage Education Workshop
  - Saturday, February 11
  - 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
  - Extension Office
- Como-Pickton Health Fair
  - Thursday, March 2
  - 5:30 to 7:00 p.m.
  - Como-Pickton Middle School
- Tuesday, April 4
  - 55+ Health Fair
  - 9:00 a.m. to noon
  - ROC – Recreation Outreach Center, First Baptist Church
- “Do Well, Be Well with Diabetes”
  - Tuesdays and Thursdays, April 4, 6, 11, 14, 18
  - Offered at two times: 1:30 p.m. or 6:00 p.m.
  - Extension Office
  - Cost: \$25 for entire series
  - Please call 903-885-3443 to reserve a space
  - If the fee is a hardship, scholarships are available.
- Dinner Bell Free Lunch
  - Every Wednesday
  - 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
  - First United Methodist Church



## Spaghetti Squash with Tomatoes, Basil, and Parmesan

**Makes:** 4 Servings    **Serving Cost:** \$1.56

### Ingredients

1 spaghetti squash (about 1 1/2 pounds)  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
3 tablespoons Parmesan cheese  
1/4 teaspoon dried oregano  
2 teaspoons dried basil (or 1/2 cup fresh basil, chopped)  
1 cup cherry tomatoes (thinly sliced)  
salt and pepper (to taste, optional)

### Directions

1. Place the 2 squash halves, cut side down, in glass baking dish. Add about 1/4 cup water and cover with plastic wrap. Microwave on high 12 minutes or until soft when pressed. Let stand covered for 3 minutes.
2. In a large bowl, whisk oil, basil, oregano and 2 Tablespoons of parmesan cheese. Stir in tomatoes and season lightly with salt and pepper to taste.
3. Scrape squash out with a fork, add strands to tomato mixture and toss until combined. Sprinkle with remaining 1 Tablespoon of Parmesan cheese.

## Creamy Tomato Soup

This recipe is a great addition to any lunch or dinner and can be served with bread or a sandwich.

### Ingredients

2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
1/2 cup onion (chopped)  
2 cloves garlic (chopped)  
1 1/2 cups low-sodium chicken broth  
1 1/2 cups water  
3 cups low-sodium diced tomatoes (canned)  
1/2 cup whole milk  
1/2 teaspoon black pepper

### Directions

1. Heat oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add onion and garlic and cook until soft, approximately 3 minutes.
2. Add chicken broth, water, and tomatoes, bring to boil. Lower heat and cook uncovered for 25 minutes or until mixture begins to thicken.
3. Remove from heat. Blend in a blender until smooth, if you'd like. Soup can be smooth or chunky. Return to pot and heat over medium heat until soup is hot.
4. Stir in milk and black pepper.

Serves 6