

COLLABORATIVE LIFE COACHING

By Jeanne Erikson, PhD



Matters of the Heart

"The thing I am most aware of is my limits..I never, or almost never, occupy the middle of my cage. My whole being surges toward the bars." Andre Gide

February is the month when the emotional and physical matters of the heart converge. Valentine's Day spotlights the emotional side. Talk of love, with it's accompanying joy, hope, or despair, and self-help advice, is everywhere. When the holiday is over, there is a let down and reality resumes. We are reminded that sustaining the love of another is a complex interchange of good manners, energy, kindness, forgiveness, and determination. Psychology, religion, Eastern exercise forms, and visual art all recognize that our heart generates energy and emotional connection reaching beyond our bodies, and when we fail to use that ability to connect with the universe wisely, our emotional health fails.

The heart organ is an amazingly complex and normally robust pump. However, February media coverage of the dangers of shoveling snow, a new PBS special on heart disease, and the February 2007 National Geographic cover story called "Healing the Heart" have highlighted its' medical fragility. We learned that most of us already have stages of heart disease. We are haunted by details of how the MEF2A and apoE4 genetic defects play a part in triggering the disease, but lifestyle is the main culprit. It is inflammation and broken plaque deposits, rather than just narrowed arteries, that trigger heart attacks. We wonder if we should be living on spinach and statins, interspersed with treadmill time.

With all this gloomy heart news, how can we develop a happy and healthy heart? Paul Pearsall, PhD, cardiology researcher and author of *The Heart's Code: Tapping the Wisdom and Power of our Heart Energy*, writes about the integration of both aspects of heart wellness. In this book and later ones, he reported research on how simple meditation, humor, singing out loud, and other techniques can prevent or reverse heart disease in addition to exercise and diet control. He advises that it is not just the medical, but the metaphysical aspects of heart energy that make the difference in health and immunity from disease. He is one of a group of pioneers helping to establish a medical connection between love, living fully, and heart health.

How can we improve our heart health? By celebrating what we already do so well, and changing what can be improved. Would you be willing to look at your own heart health today by answering these questions?

1. How high a priority is love in your daily life?

To answer this question, try counting the minutes/hours a day you spend talking to or touching your loved ones the past week. Behavior speaks louder than intention. If you are not satisfied with your answer, when today could you add more time? What could you eliminate today so you can make more time? Something else will likely have to go.

2. When was the last time you felt a strong face-to-face connection to a friend?

This can be measured by crying together, holding hands, a soulful conversation, etc. E-mail doesn't count, as it is a barrier to emotion. If this answer is not within the past few days, you could make an appointment with a friend for lunch, to go dancing, have a beer, go bowling, go to Bible study or church together, or go to a sensitive or philosophical movie that will trigger deep discussion.

3. When was your last cholesterol check? Do you know how to raise your good (HDL) cholesterol level?

If the answer is more than one year, act now by calling your doctor for a screening cholesterol test. You can raise your good cholesterol ratio through exercise and control of obesity, especially that in the abdomen. The web site WebMD.com, and the Heart Association will have other suggestions.

4. What do you do daily now with diet and exercise to move toward a heart-healthy lifestyle?

We have all heard we should be moving around in a vigorous way at least thirty minutes a day, five days a week. This moves Qi (energy) according to Chinese Medicine, keeps your metabolism tuned so weight control is easier, aides in creation of healthier fat ratios, and creates positive brain chemistry so you feel happier and sleep better. Isn't it amazing motion can accomplish all this? What could you do today for 15 minutes as a start? If you have steps in your house, or a yard to walk in, you have the equipment you need to exercise. If you can do this 15 minutes a day for two weeks, you have changed your lifestyle!

You may already have a perfect diet. If not, something you could do today for your diet would be to eat a cup of yogurt or something green or dark yellow. Gummy bears don't count. Could you eat less red meat and not buy fast food today? Could you eat a few nuts instead of chips? When you fill up with gas, could you skip the fatty coffee additives and the donut? Simple changes will work.

I wish for you a healthy heart in the full sense of the word. We can choose to openly give and receive love, and also care for our heart organ as well. Without both, not only may you spend a lot of time with doctors in the future, you can not reach your full potential as a human.

To your wellness!

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