



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Weekly Column #3: It's never too late to make healthy life choices

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO February 8, 2016

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Last month I celebrated a milestone birthday in my life.

As with any birthday, it was the perfect opportunity to reflect upon how I've lived my life so far. There were plenty of good days, and I will always be proud to have committed so much of my life in public service to improving people's lives while making our communities better places to live.

But as we get older, many of us can't help but ask ourselves if we've been living a healthy lifestyle. As your State Senator, I'll admit that it isn't always easy to make sure I'm eating right and getting enough exercise while focusing on the obligations of my job. I try my best, but I know I could do better.

That's why American Heart Month is so important – this February is a chance to raise awareness about healthy living.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women living in the United States, and 29 percent of American adults – that's 1 in every 3 of us – have high blood pressure. There's no doubt we all know someone who has been touched by this tragedy. These are unfortunate statistics, but fortunately heart disease can be prevented by making better choices about how we live.

We all want to experience long, healthy lives, and we wish the same for our friends and loved ones. By encouraging those around us to properly manage their diet and exercise, we can be hopeful that our close relationships are as lasting and as fulfilling as possible.

But first, this goal starts with you. It is never too late to start living a healthier, more active life, and anything is better than nothing. For adults, the U.S. Department of Health recommends 2 hours and 30 minutes each week of moderate aerobic activity – like walking fast, dancing, and biking. But being physically active even for just 10 to 15 minutes two or three times a day can still help burn calories and get rid of extra weight.

Watching what we eat is also very important. It's easy to indulge in snacks here and there at work, but we should strive to discipline ourselves: Limit sodium, added sugars and trans fats, like cakes, cookies and fried foods. Also don't eat too much saturated fats from animal products, like cheese, fatty meats, whole milk and butter.

Some better choices would include meals that are steamed or broiled, seafood and lean meats or poultry. Bring fresh fruit, unsalted nuts or low-fat string cheese to snack on, especially during long drives. Look for foods that contain at least 20 percent of fiber, calcium, potassium and vitamin D.

Finally, don't be afraid to talk to your doctor. You know your body better than anyone, so never hesitate to ask questions if you've been feeling more tired or dizzy, experiencing pain or having trouble breathing. Have your blood pressure and cholesterol checked every few years, as well.

Of course, most people don't like to be told what to do, or how to live their lives. But in this case, taking steps toward a healthier lifestyle can help you feel stronger, more energetic, less stressed and more optimistic about life. American Heart Month is a great chance to give it a

shot, for yourself and for those you care about.

For more information on healthy living, visit the American Heart Association at www.heart.org.

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