

Mending broken hearts

To most of us, the month of February is associated with Valentine hearts and romance. Walk along any high street and we are visually bombarded with seductive red hearts, pulsating out the message of love. Since the beginning of time the heart has been deemed the centre of human emotion – whether it be the adolescent twang of Cupid's bow, the ache of true love or the crushing angst of unrequited love. The complex biology of being happy or sad which is sparked in our brain somehow becomes mystically rooted in our heart.

Medically, mending broken hearts comes high on a list of skills. The 300g of unique muscle tissue which is the human heart beats 100,000 times a day and propels five litres of blood through 60,000 miles of blood vessels. Awake and asleep this faithful pump gives us little pause for thought in good health. However, heart disease is a malady reaching global epidemic proportions with fast foods, smoking, stress, the rise of the couch potato and more recently genetics, being the usual suspects on the list of risk factors. To help stem this lethal tide cardiologists can prescribe drugs, perform surgery and recommend lifestyle changes. High on the list of such changes comes nutrition.

The food that we choose to place in our mouths and the lifestyle choices we make have been scientifically proven to influence the development of cardiovascular disease. Diets deficient in antioxidant nutrients can be detrimental to heart health and eating a whole-food diet including whole grains, nuts, seeds, beans, lentils, fruits and vegetables is the best way to ensure protective nutrients. Foods high in sugar and saturated fat can encourage obesity and lead to diabetes which is another risk factor for heart disease. Such foods can also negatively impact on the much maligned cholesterol molecule circulating in the bloodstream – the danger here being that it may be converted into a lethal form under conditions of poor nutrition. A diet rich in fibre, plant sterols and essential oils helps us to remove cholesterol, which is surplus to requirements, from our body. The Omega 9 oil, olive oil, is a healthy option when it comes to cooking and polyunsaturated oils from nuts and seeds and cold-pressed seed oils, like rapeseed or flaxseed, are essential for cardiovascular health as they help to thin the blood and control inflammation in our arteries.

Excessive stress is integral to most health problems and heart disease is no exception. Stress can have dire consequences for stable blood pressure and combined with dietary deficiencies may be implicated in the pathology of a heart attack.

Last, but not least, being sedentary increases the risk for obesity and blood sugar imbalance both of which are significant risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Appropriate levels of

aerobic exercise, like regular brisk walking, helps stimulate the circulation which nourishes all the body cells with nutrients.

The good news is that research in the field of broken hearts continues to thrive. The knowledge gained from this, and what we do with it, could make the difference between life and death. The choice, as always, will be ours.

For nutritional advice on a range of health problems please contact:

Thelma Middleton

BSc(Hons) Nutritional Therapy

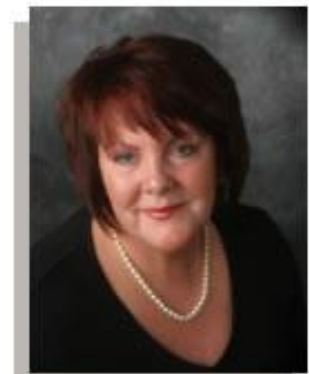
Consulting at The Centre For Complementary Therapies

Kinmylies, Inverness

Tel: 01381 600534

www.nutritionalhealthpractice.co.uk

email: info@nutrihealthpractice.co.uk



THELMA MIDDLETON