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Prescription for a healthy heart, world

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February is Heart Disease Awareness Month, an opportunity for everyone to reflect on the paramount importance of maintaining a healthy heart.

Much emphasis is placed on what you can do to sustain your heart. None of the advice is complicated, and chances are you've heard it before: Eat right; watch your weight; exercise; don't smoke; get plenty of sleep and reduce stress.

Follow that advice and your heart will be stronger; don't follow it, and your heart will grow weaker. It really is that simple.

Still, despite our most proactive efforts to do all the right things, there are circumstances in life that are beyond our control. As much as we try to avoid stress in our lives, we will never eliminate it. We can, however, manage our reactions to the stressful things, which, if left unchecked, can wreak havoc on our emotional and physical well-being.

Like our hearts, the world around us is fascinating and complex. But, unlike our hearts, life is unpredictable and not as dependable. Just when we think we are on pace to reach our goals, some unforeseen obstacle impedes our progress. The trick is not to allow stress to overwhelm us.

If the world was my patient, I would prescribe:

- Paying attention to your diet. It is fundamental to your health. But while you're thinking about what you are eating, you also should think about those who do not have enough to eat. About 49 million Americans are hungry; helping to feed them will nurture their bodies and your soul.

- Being fair and honest in all your dealings with

others. Expose injustice, greed or fraud when you see it. You will be amazed at how a clean conscience can improve your outlook and bring prosperity to your life.

- Eliminating guilt in your life. Practicing moderation, tolerance and fidelity will ease your stress and make you stronger mentally and physically.

- Loving your family. This means more than being your kids' banker and taxi service. It means setting an example as a good parent. It means teaching your children how to develop a healthy lifestyle. It means taking care of your parents and demonstrating to your children why they must respect and show compassion for their elders, even when it is inconvenient or costly. Show them why time is precious.

- Finding your place in a global society. Don't just complain about the economy, or global warming, or racial strife, do something about it. Study the issues. Become a community activist. Raise awareness about the problems we share. Often, the best remedy for uncertain times is a dose of certainty as it relates to our convictions.

- Practicing charity daily. Sponsor a child. Visit a shut-in. Donate to a veterans group. Be generous with your praise and stingy with your criticism. Make it your personal responsibility to warm someone's heart and bring a smile to their face.

February may be the heart month, but it requires a year-round effort. Yes, you need to eat right, exercise and probably drop a few pounds. But another sure way to make a lasting impact on your health is to fill your heart with hope, peace and goodwill.