THE HEART OF THE MATTER

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The National Institute for Health recommends limiting salt intake to about 1 teaspoon a day. Be mindful of how much salt you add to your food.

**F**ebruary marked American Heart Month. The heart is an amazingly designed muscle that pumps blood through our bodies. According to estimates, during the average human life, the heart will beat roughly 2.5 billion times (ucsb.edu). According to Dr. Carl Bianco, a specialist in emergency medicine, the heart will pump 48 million gallons of blood by the time a person reaches age 70.

For all its marvels, the heart must have proper care in order to function properly. Without proper care of our hearts, we increase our chances of becoming a statistic. The CDC (Centers for Disease Control) lists heart disease as the leading cause of death in the United States for both men and women and most of us probably know someone who has had heart disease, a heart attack or suffered a stroke.

So, what are some easy ways to promote heart health? From a nutrition perspective, eating a healthy diet and regular exercise tops the list. Better Living for Texans offers several research-based lessons that can help you adopt better eating habits which will benefit your heart. We can also help you learn to make better decisions when choosing meals and snacks. In addition, we can provide you with delicious, healthy recipes that will satisfy your taste buds and make your heart happy!

One of the most important things to realize when creating an eating plan that promotes heart health is to include variety in your diet. Despite what some may claim, there are no super foods. No food has all the nutrients and other substances that your heart (and the rest of your body) needs. So, choose a low-sodium diet that includes whole grains, vegetables and fruits, as well as lean protein low in saturated fats and cholesterol. Remember to watch portion sizes as part of a heart-friendly diet.

*If you are interested in nutrition classes offered by Better Living for Texans, contact the Family and Consumer Sciences Agent at your local Texas AgriLife Extension: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

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**F**eatured Recipe: ***Chicken and Broccoli Bake*** *(cost per recipe: $7.90; Per serving: $0.93)*

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**Ingredients**

1 cup rice, uncooked
1 package (10 ounce) frozen broccoli, thawed
3 cups cooked chicken
2 Tablespoons margarine or butter
1/4 cup flour
2 cups chicken broth
1/4 cup Parmesan cheese (optional)

**Instructions (pre-heat oven to 350 degrees)**

1. Cook rice in 2 cups of water.
2. Melt margarine in large sauce pan.
3. Add flour to melted margarine and stir.
4. Slowly add chicken broth to margarine/flour mixture (stir to remove any lumps and to thicken).
5. Add cheese and stir.
6. Add rice, broccoli, and chicken. Stir.
7. Put in a 10 inch casserole pan and bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes or until thoroughly heated.

