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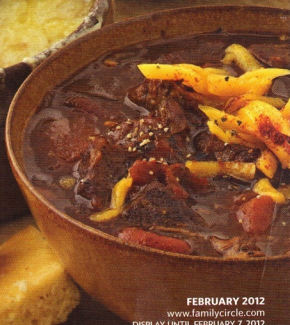
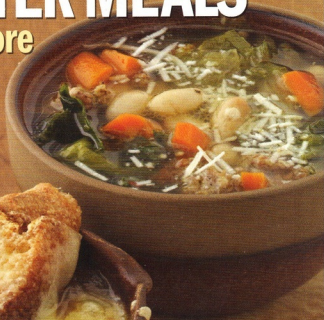
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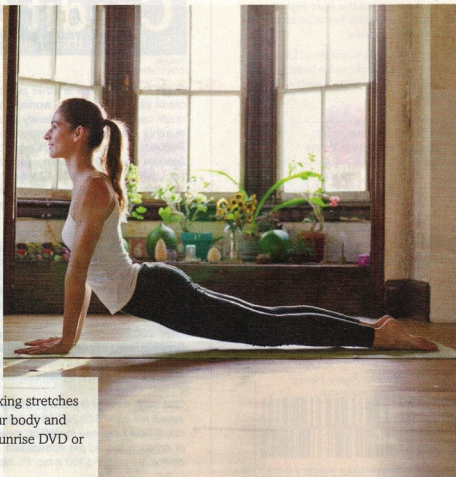
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LOVE YOUR HEART EVERY DAY

Little changes can have a dramatic impact when it comes to the most important muscle in your body. **BY GINA ROBERTS-GREY**

What if you could stop heart disease in its tracks—essentially tell an ailment that claims the lives of more women in the U.S. than all cancers combined not to bother knocking on your door? Well, you can. Heart disease is no match for a well-informed woman on a mission. And taking it on doesn't require turning your already-busy world upside down. "You don't have to forgo every favorite food or spend hours a day in the gym to prevent heart disease," says cardiologist Suzanne Steinbaum, D.O., director of Women and Heart Disease at the Heart and Vascular Institute of Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City and a spokesperson for the Go Red for Women campaign. "If you do one thing a day, by the end of the month you'll have a healthier heart." These 29 daily tips (yes, it's a leap year) are easy, effective, expert-endorsed ways to make preventing and managing heart disease fit into your lifestyle.



TAKE IT TO THE MAT Yoga's relaxing stretches can reduce levels of stress hormones in your body and lower your heart rate. Start the day with a sunrise DVD or head to a class on your lunch break.



MAKE OVER YOUR BREAKFAST

Instead of dishing out cold cereal or bacon and eggs, reduce your family's fat and cholesterol intake as much as 20% by serving everyone 1 cup of cooked oatmeal. "I eat a bowl every morning for my heart," says *90210* actress Jennie Garth, mom of three teens and tweens, whose father died of heart disease. Pair it with a slice of whole-grain toast topped with a pat of Benecol (a healthy margarine substitute) and an 8-ounce glass of Minute Maid Heart Wise orange juice. "This meal is rich in plant sterols so it starts your family's day off on a very heart-healthy note," says Anne VanBeber, R.D., a professor at Texas Christian University.

♥ HEART TIP

1 in 6 people will have a stroke in their lifetime. Learn the signs (see tip #19) for a better recovery.



GET READY FOR BED

When you're about to hit the sack, don't hop online to order new curtains for your daughter's room and don't watch TV. "Turn off all electronic devices at least one hour before going to bed so your body and brain can begin to unwind. That will up the odds of sleeping soundly," says Martha Grogan, M.D., a cardiologist at the Mayo Clinic and medical editor of *Mayo Clinic Healthy Heart For Life!* (Time Home Entertainment Inc.) New research published by the American Heart Association says tossing and turning all night more than once a week increases your risk of heart disease by at least 27%.



SCREEN YOUR FRIENDS

Call your girlfriends and plan a meet-up at a local pharmacy for a blood pressure check. Dr. Steinbaum has heard of groups of women going for mammograms together and says they should tap into that type of support to see if they have or are at risk for hypertension, too.



SHOW SOME SUPER BOWL SPIRIT

Learn the words to your team's fight song and sing them while prepping food for the game or with the family during halftime. Even if your players aren't in the big game, belting out any two tunes can lower blood pressure as much as 25%.



WRITE TO SAVE A LIFE

Protect your social network by making this today's Facebook status

update: *Family Circle* wants you to know roughly one third of women don't have any chest pain when experiencing a heart attack. Instead they sometimes feel light-headed, unusually fatigued or break out in an inexplicable sweat. If they do have pain, women tend to feel heaviness in the chest. Pay attention to the signs.

"Women tend to ignore their own symptoms of a heart attack even though they'd never allow a loved one to do the same thing," says A. Marc Gillinov, M.D., cardiac surgeon and surgical director at the Center for Atrial Fibrillation at the Cleveland Clinic and co-author of *Heart 411: The Only Guide to Heart Health You'll Ever Need* (Three Rivers Press).



CHANGE YOUR OIL

Swap extra-virgin olive oil or canola oil for other types of cooking oil in tonight's dinner recipes, suggests Dr. Gillinov. "They are low in saturated fats and a source of heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids."



MAKE SOMEONE'S DAY

Go out of your way to compliment a person at the grocery store or your kid's hockey game. "If you make them happy, you'll make yourself happy," says Dr. Grogan. Happiness reduces stress hormones in your body, and helps your heart recover faster after vigorous exercise or exertion, according to a University of Illinois study.



HOP ON YOUR FEET

Stand up to fold laundry, balance the checkbook or pay bills online. "Studies show that prolonged sitting, or sitting for the majority of the day, may increase your risk of cardiovascular disease as much as smoking," says Dr. Grogan. On the flip side, standing and strolling around help improve circulation and the health of your arteries. "So does quitting smoking if you're a smoker," she adds.



REACH FOR NUTS

Rein in cholesterol by sprinkling unsalted nuts on your salad, yogurt or oatmeal. "Nuts are rich in plant sterols, natural substances that block absorption of cholesterol from the digestive tract," says Stephen Devries, M.D., a preventive cardiologist at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago. Two handfuls a day (about 2 ounces) have been shown to reduce "bad" LDL cholesterol by 10 points. "Almonds and walnuts offer the most benefit," says Devries.



♥ HEART TIP

Just 13% of women think they're at risk for heart disease, when in reality it's the number one killer in America. See tip #15 to figure out where you stand.

11

REVAMP YOUR PANTRY

Look for five things on your shelves that are high in sodium, fat or sugar. On your next supermarket run purchase fresh ingredients to make healthier versions of those foods. To protect all the hearts in her family, health advocate and former boxer Laila Ali says she turned her kitchen upside down. "I cleaned out my pantry and tossed things that weren't natural or organic and replaced them with food from the Earth," she says. "Now we eat a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables."

12

HAVE A GOOD LAUGH

Stream or download an episode of your favorite sitcom. Thirty minutes of laughing can provide your heart a healthy boost for up to 24 hours, says

readings, upping the number an average of 14 points. "For the most accurate reading, sit upright in a chair with your back supported or lie down comfortably on an exam room table," says Kameswari Maganti, M.D., cardiologist and director of cardiac rehabilitation at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago. "Your arms should be supported at the level of your heart, not hanging at your sides. Wait quietly for five minutes before your pressure is measured."

16

KICK BACK WITH A CUP OF COCOA

Start a snowball fight with the family, then warm everyone up with a batch of hot cocoa made with dark chocolate and low-fat milk. Flavanols, natural plant compounds in dark cocoa, help your blood vessels function better, which reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease.



17

SEND A CONTRACT

E-mail an agreement to the women in your life that states none of you will ignore heart health or signs you could be having a heart attack (download one at familycircle.com/pledge). Having a written contract keeps you accountable to one another. "Make sure you all commit in the e-mail to calling 911 immediately if you suspect you're having a heart attack," says Dr. Grogan.

18

DRESS DOWN YOUR SALAD

Swap creamy dressing for a few tablespoons of a homemade blend of extra-virgin olive oil and balsamic vinegar, says Dr. Gillinov. "Olive oil is a healthy fat that's good for your heart." Spice up salads with this easy dressing: 1 sprig fresh oregano, 1 sprig fresh thyme, 1 cup olive oil, ¼ cup balsamic vinegar, pepper to taste.

19

KNOW THE SIGNS OF STROKE

Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or seeing in one or both eyes or difficulty walking are signals that a blood vessel carrying oxygen to your brain is blocked. "Recognizing what's happening can help you, or a loved one, get to the hospital sooner rather than later. Many medicines to prevent permanent damage need to be taken within hours of a stroke," says Dr. Grogan. Other signs are sudden numbness or weakness in the face, arm or leg, especially if it's on only one side of the body.



13

GET IN TOUCH WITH NATURE

Even if there's snow on the ground, walk things up and walk in a park, a field, the woods or down a tree-lined path instead of on a treadmill or at the mall. Researchers found walking in woody places lowers the stress hormone cortisol by almost 16% and blood pressure by almost 4%.

a new study. Turns out watching a comedy can open up your arteries, allowing blood to flow more freely and reducing your blood pressure.

14

TAKE A CLASS

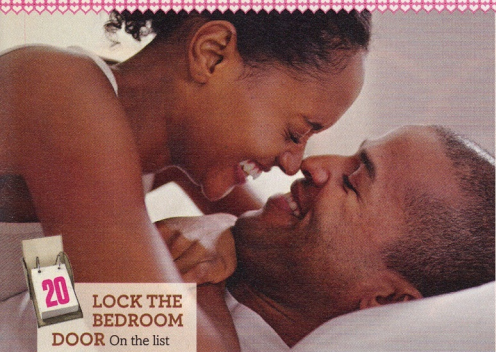
Give your book club, Bunco group or wine circle a life-saving read: a pamphlet about chest-compression-only CPR that you can get from your local fire department, hospital or community college. Suggest meeting up to attend a class so you're all prepared if you see someone collapse from cardiac arrest. Find a session near you through the American Heart Association (heart.org).

15

GET A PRECISE READING

Learn your four heart numbers: blood pressure, BMI (body mass index), cholesterol and blood glucose. Have those heart disease warning signs checked as often as your doctor recommends, and ask him if you're in the proper position when he does the blood pressure test. Your posture can lead to inaccurate





20 LOCK THE BEDROOM DOOR

On the list of wellness benefits to getting it on, a healthier heart sits high. "During sex, hormones that increase the immune response are released," says Dr. Steinbaum. And a boosted immune system can help your heart. You might also take note that erectile dysfunction has been linked to heart disease. So if your husband's having trouble in that area, make sure he books an appointment with his M.D.

21 TIME YOUR MEDS If you, your mom, your best friend or a co-worker takes medicine to curb blood pressure, make sure everyone knows that *when* you take the drug is critical. Swallowing your pill before bed cuts the risk of a heart attack, stroke or heart failure by more than half, according to new research.

22 CHILL OUT WITH A HAPPY STORY To stop your blood pressure from soaring when you're stuck in traffic, irked at the office, or upset over a fight with your teen, Dr. Gillinov suggests focusing on a positive. "Acknowledge out loud something about your teen that makes you proud, or remind yourself how prepared you are for work, to keep your heart calm," he says.

23 START WITH 10 Not enough hours today to go for a run or squeeze in a rigorous aerobics class? "Walking, chasing the kids through the snow, or jogging just 10 minutes a day dramatically decreases the risk of heart attack and stroke in women," says Dr. Grogan. Need ideas? Check out the moves on page 100.

24 SWEETEN UP Indulge your love of chocolate. Researchers found that eating dark or milk chocolate daily can reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease by 37%. Aim for no more than one or two Hershey's kisses or one square of a regular-size chocolate bar a day to reap the benefit without packing on pounds.

25 ENJOY A TASTE OF SUMMER Surprise your family with watermelon as a snack or side dish for tonight's dinner. Three cups of watermelon a day can help control your blood pressure by keeping your arteries healthy, says a new study.

26 TAKE THE LONG WAY You can burn up to 100 more calories a day if you park in the spot farthest from the door at the grocery store, use the stairs instead of the escalator at the mall, or make multiple trips up and down the stairs when you're putting away laundry. "Those little choices add up to a lot of beneficial exercise that you don't even realize you're doing," says Rose Marie Robertson, M.D., chief science officer of the American Heart Association and Family Circle Advisory Board member.

27 SAY NO TO SODA Float a slice of lemon, orange or cucumber in water instead of grabbing a soft drink when you're thirsty. Drinking two or more sugar-sweetened beverages daily may expand a woman's waistline and increase her risk of heart disease and diabetes, according to the American Heart Association. "Diet and regular soda are associated with metabolic syndrome and an increased risk for heart disease," says Dr. Steinbaum.

28 MAKE YOUR SMILE SPARKLE Call the dentist right now to schedule everyone's regular cleaning. A beautiful smile can lower the whole family's risk of heart disease by 24% and of stroke by 13%, according to new research. A professional cleaning appears to reduce bacterial growth that causes inflammation that can lead to heart disease or stroke.

29 JOIN HEARTS "Women are more inclined than men to form supportive social circles," says Dr. Grogan, who notes the positive impact a network of heart disease fighters could have. Whether you want to create better lifestyle habits (like dropping a few pounds) or have heart disease and want to connect with others that do, there's power in numbers. Call your doctor or local hospital today for information on heart-related support groups, form your own with friends and neighbors, or reach out to an organization like WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women With Heart Disease (womenheart.org), for meeting referrals. ●

♥ HEART TIP

Only 53% of women would call 911 if they thought they were having a heart attack. Don't waste precious minutes!

