

Inspiring women

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 **Franciscan**
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Letter *from* Franciscan

Hello!

As mid-winter sets in, we hope this issue of *Inspiring Women* brings a spark of warmth to you and your family. With February being Heart Health Month, we're diving head first into the human heart. Join us as we explore both the physical heart—the rhythmic beat that gives us life—and the emotional heart—the spark of love, joy and so many more emotions.


In this issue, we're covering Valentine's Day recipes, various ways to love others and yourself, prayer strategies and even heart health tips!

Our feature story, "The Heart of the Matter," takes a deep dive into the intricate relationship between our physical and emotional heart. There's so much more to our hearts than simply pumping blood!

We're also featuring an article on building your personal community. No matter where you are in life, having people to share the journey with is crucial. It's other people in our lives who help fuel our hearts to keep moving forward! This journey of life is not one we are meant to walk alone. We hope you take the time to learn more about how to make deeper connections with the people around you.

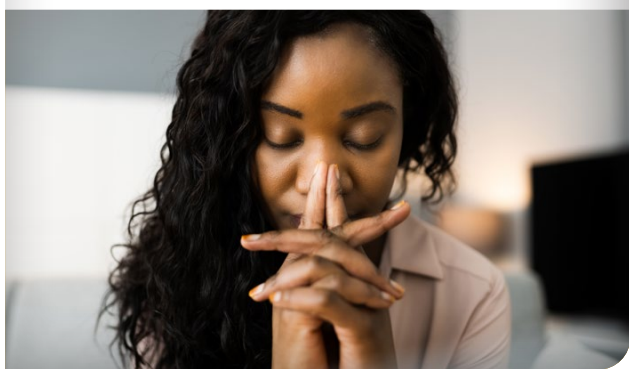
At *Inspiring Women*, we also care about your spiritual heart. We hope you enjoy learning about the P.R.A.I.S.E. prayer method as well as the "hour of prayer" activity that you can try on your own or together with family and friends!

Lastly, if you're ready to take an active approach to your heart health, reach out to Franciscan Health for a heart scan and a heart risk assessment. The medical professionals at Franciscan can help guide you to what your heart really needs!



Heart Scan & Risk Assessments

Call (833) 238-0688 or scan the link to request an appointment.



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The P.R.A.I.S.E. Prayer Method

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction,
faithful in prayer.”

Romans 12:12 NIV

Praise - Gratify God and remember what He has already done for you.

Repent - Confess sin in your life, and seek forgiveness in God.

Ask - Be honest with God. Ask Him for the things you desire.

Intercede - Step into the gap to pray for those on your heart and in your life.

Seek - Pray for God's wisdom and ask for His will to be revealed to you.

Enjoy - Allow yourself to find joy and peace in spending time with our Heavenly Father.

The P.R.A.I.S.E. prayer method is a tool that can help grow your spiritual walk by leaps and bounds. Think of P.R.A.I.S.E. as a way to remember a few simple steps during prayer time.

PRAISE

The first step in P.R.A.I.S.E. is **praise** itself! Before you ask God for anything, express gratitude, love and joy toward Him. Take a breather, and let the anxieties, stresses and concerns of your mind wait. Focus on giving God glory. Often it can be helpful to listen to worship music or read through a passage of scripture that lifts God. If you need some guidance, start by reading through Psalm 34, a psalm of praise and joy.

REPENT

To **repent**, we start with confessing our sins to God. Start small and think through everything that happened in the past day or so. Where was there sin in your life? Don't think about how to correct it right away, simply open yourself to God. The next step in repentance is to ask God for forgiveness, and thank Him. Christ went to the cross for our sins, and that includes the ones we've made today and the ones we'll make tomorrow.

ASK

When you arrive at the **ask** moment of your prayer time, tell God what you need. Get personal because this is the moment to lay it all on the line. From requesting safe travels for an upcoming trip to seeking healing, your desires are never trivial to your Father. God wants to carry the burdens weighing you down. All you have to do is give Him what lies heaviest on your heart.

INTERCEDE

To **intercede** means to intervene or stand in the place of another. Jesus intercedes for us by taking all our blemishes and pain to the cross and continuing to step in on our behalf today.

While we are not Jesus, we can step in and intercede for those around us through prayer. Prayerful intercession means you're no longer focusing on yourself. Now is a time to pray for friends, family, co-workers and anyone else. All you need to do is cover others in prayer.

SEEK

This is a time in prayer to slow down and listen. **Seek** God's will and how it may align, or clash with the things you have prayed about already. Reflect a bit on what it is you've been praying for. It can be helpful to ask how your will might look different than God's—and why those differences exist. Seeking God's will means taking into account what you know about God and applying it to what you've prayed about.

ENJOY

It's time to simply **enjoy** His presence.

Remember, we are always in God's presence, thanks to the Holy Spirit. He is always with us. But we so often take that for granted. Take the time to be joyful with God. Maybe it's when you get quiet and simply listen for God's direction. Maybe you feel renewed by your time in prayer. Maybe it's when you dig deeper into His word. Whatever it is, let yourself enjoy His presence.



A Heartfelt Approach to Aging:

TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR HEART STRONG

Your heart plays a massive role in overall health and longevity—especially as time goes by and you climb into your golden years. Use these tips and techniques to keep your heart beating strong through every stage of life.

In Your 30s

While few women experience heart issues in their thirties, it's never too soon to prepare for the future. Use this time in your life to look into the medical history of close relatives—especially your parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. If any of these people have experienced a heart attack, heart surgery of any kind or stroke, do your research on the circumstances and conditions that led to it. Also, if you're pregnant in your thirties, keep an eye out for accompanying red flags that allude to more problems later in life. High blood pressure, gestational diabetes and preterm labor during pregnancy can all be indicators of circulatory system issues.

In Your 40s

No matter how healthy you feel in your forties, now's the time to build a close relationship with your primary care physician and begin routine monitoring. Start having your blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol levels tested on a regular basis to nip any heart issues in the bud.

Ask your doctor about getting an electrocardiogram to serve as a baseline reference for problems that may develop down the road.

In Your 50s and Beyond

Veggies start to become your heart's best friend during this stage of life, so spend lots of time in the produce section and learn which leafy greens you most enjoy. Stay active to avoid gaining weight after menopause when hormones fluctuate and organ-harming belly fat tends to increase. And while you may be nearing or enjoying your retirement, your heart still has many years of work left. Do everything you can to make its job easier!

If you need help tracking your medical history and staying up-to-date with routine tests, Franciscan Health is here to guide you. Schedule an appointment with one of our qualified experts today.



SCAN THE QR CODE
TO REQUEST AN
APPOINTMENT

STRETCHING CAN BOOST HEART HEALTH

It's well-known that stretching benefits your muscles and tendons. When combined with breathing techniques, it's also known to benefit your mind. More recently, it's been discovered that stretching may benefit your cardiovascular system as well. Here are some simple stretches to try for a stronger heart and better vascular function.

Stretches to Try

Forward Fold

Hang loose and let gravity do the work of stretching your legs' posterior muscles.

Supine Hamstring Stretch

Use a towel to help pull your leg back into your body. You'll feel the stretch in your hamstring and calf muscles.

Prone Quad Stretch

Loop a towel around your foot and gently tug it from over your shoulder. Keep your quad flat to the floor while you stretch.

Breathing for BETTER CIRCULATION

Certain breathing exercises have been shown to help with circulation in general as well. Here are a few you can try.

Deep Diaphragm Breaths

Lay on the floor with a pillow under your knees. Place one hand over your chest and the other on your upper abdomen. Take several deep, slow breaths through your nostrils, feeling the breath inflate your lower stomach each time.

Alternate Closed Nostril Breathing

Sit or stand upright and gently pinch one nostril closed with your hand. Inhale deeply, then release your nostril, pinch the other nostril and exhale. Repeat several times, alternating sides with each breath.

Counted Segmented Breaths

In any comfortable position, breathe in deeply for five seconds, hold the breath for five seconds and exhale for five seconds. Then, with your lungs empty, wait another five seconds before repeating the cycle. Experiment with different lengths of breath. The focus on counting helps destress the body and lower blood pressure.



CARDIOLOGY

ASK AN EXPERT



Kendra Marsh-Kates, MD

Cardiology
Olympia Fields

.....
Wish your doctor was on speed dial? We talked with some experts at Franciscan Health to answer your most pressing questions. This is what they had to say!

FIND A
FRANCISCAN DOC



1. **Are women more at risk for heart issues? What might be some risk factors to consider?**

Women face unique heart disease risks, especially related to hormonal changes and pregnancy-related conditions. Key factors include high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, obesity, smoking and a family history of heart disease. It's important for women to monitor these risk factors and maintain regular health check-ups.

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2. **How would I know if I have heart issues? What should I look out for?**

Common signs of heart problems include chest discomfort, especially during physical exertion, and shortness of breath in daily activities. Additionally, symptoms like unusual fatigue, dizziness and palpitations are indicators to seek medical advice.

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3. **How can I help ease stress on my heart in my day-to-day life?**

To reduce stress on your heart, maintain a balanced diet, engage in regular moderate exercise and manage stress through techniques like meditation or stretching. Prioritizing adequate sleep and avoiding smoking are also key to heart health.



Have questions you'd like to see answered in future issues? Visit inspiringwomen.org/ask-a-doc or scan the QR and submit them today!



Hometown Leaders in Heart Care

Take a Heart Risk Assessment or Schedule an Appointment



Our comprehensive cardiovascular programs are leading the way for heart care, offering preventative services and advanced treatments closer to your home.

Experience cutting-edge heart care with hometown warmth, where our greatest reward is caring for your one and only heart.



FranciscanHealth.org/HeartCare



In the age of oversharing and constant connectivity, it's crucial to strike a delicate balance between expressing ourselves authentically and being mindful of our impact on others. Social media provides a window into our lives, inviting us to share our triumphs, struggles and everyday moments with the world. However, we should consider the morality of posting about our own lives, recognizing when self-expression might turn into excessive self-centeredness.

Authentic or Narcissistic?

It's not wrong to share your life on Instagram or Facebook! Sharing our experiences and emotions can be a powerful way to connect with others and foster genuine relationships. However, it's essential to differentiate between authenticity and narcissism. Being authentic means expressing ourselves sincerely and vulnerably, whereas narcissism involves excessive self-promotion and seeking constant validation. It can be easy to slip into an unhealthy cycle of posting and needing to see people like and comment. Reflect on your motives behind each post, ensuring they come from a place of genuine self-expression rather than a hunger for attention.

Finding Balance and Purpose

Mindful posting involves finding a balance between self-expression and selflessness. Consider the overall purpose of your posts and how they contribute to the online community. Share meaningful stories, insights and moments that offer value to others, rather than merely showcasing the highlights of your life. Are you trying to create a digital scrapbook of your life? Or maybe you just like to share memes with your friends. Either way, establishing for yourself what using social media looks like will help you find a healthy balance.

Setting Boundaries

Acknowledging the achievements and milestones of others can counteract the potential selfishness of self-centered posting. Celebrate the accomplishments of friends, colleagues and family members, fostering a sense of community and mutual support. By highlighting the successes of others, you contribute to a more positive and uplifting social media environment. However, we need to be sure to respect personal boundaries. Some experiences may be deeply personal, and sharing them publicly might hinder personal growth or lead to unnecessary exposure. For example, maybe you're very proud of a loved one like your husband or child for something they've done. Before you post

about it, think about how they would feel about it being made public. Would they post it themselves? It can often be a quick and easy conversation with the person to let them know you are proud and want to share it! Prioritize emotional well-being and seek to share experiences in ways that enhance self-awareness and understanding, rather than just flaunting each success you come across.

Dangers of Doom Scrolling

Doom Scrolling, the act of mindlessly getting on social media for long periods, is becoming more and more popular. This addictive behavior makes social media a major time vacuum. To help steer clear of this, you can take an active approach to your time on social media, in posting and scrolling. As social media continuously evolves, so should our approach to using it. Regularly reflecting on your social media habits and their impact on yourself and others will help you stay aware of what social media is to you and if it's getting too close.

Did you know?

The average screen time in the United States is 7 hours 4 minutes per day.

By striking a balance between self-expression and selflessness, we can cultivate a digital space that fosters meaningful connections, promotes understanding and celebrates the collective journey of humanity. Remember, social media doesn't define how we are doing. If you are ever feeling frustrated or tired of seeing the same posts over and over, put the phone down for a bit. Social media is not inherently bad, but when we allow it to lead our emotions, it can take over in ways that are incredibly unhealthy. So, remember to look up every once in a while, and enjoy the world that's right in front of you first!



The Heart Of the Matter

Exploring the Intricacies of
the Human Heart

The human heart, a remarkable organ at the center of our circulatory system, is a powerful and intricately designed muscle that propels life-giving blood throughout our bodies. But the heart is so much more than just another organ. Hearts are tied to emotions and how we experience the world around us. From true love to heartbreak, we feel emotions in the depths of our hearts. As we delve into the rhythmic dance between emotion and the physical heart, it becomes evident that safeguarding this vital organ is not only a medical imperative but a fundamental aspect of women's holistic well-being—perhaps even the key to cultivating a strong mind, body and spirit.

THE PHYSICAL HEART: ANATOMY AND FUNCTION

Comprising four chambers—two atria and two ventricles—the heart operates with rhythmic precision, ensuring oxygenated blood reaches every cell while simultaneously expelling deoxygenated blood. This dynamic process is

essential for maintaining the body's overall health and functionality. In women, understanding the nuances of the heart's structure and function is particularly crucial, given the unique aspects of female cardiovascular health. Cardiovascular diseases continue to be a leading cause of morbidity and mortality among females worldwide.

Beyond its role in sustaining life, the heart is a barometer of overall well-being, and maintaining its health is integral to a woman's longevity and quality of life. Current statistics reveal alarming trends in heart-related health issues among women, with an increasing prevalence of conditions such as heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular disorders. These trends underscore the pressing need for comprehensive awareness campaigns, preventive measures and tailored healthcare strategies to address the specific challenges that women face in preserving their heart health.

THE INTRICATE DANCE OF EMOTION AND HEART HEALTH

Think about telling someone you love them. Is it just words, or is there something deeper—a mix of feelings and thoughts? Harvard Medical School explains, "Psychological factors are—literally—heartfelt," meaning our emotions impact not only our minds but also our physical hearts. Let's explore this mysterious connection that transcends time and weaves through diverse cultures

Our journey through the heart-mind connection takes us to our natural response to stressors. Physical exertion, like exercise, sets off a cascade of responses: accelerated heartbeat, heightened blood pressure and intensified breathing. This orchestrated exertion, when controlled and regular, is beneficial. It's like stretching a muscle to build strength. However, the abruptness of intense emotional stress, such as receiving devastating news, distinguishes itself. Dr. Krishna Sudhir, physician, cardiologist and educator, sheds light on this phenomenon, emphasizing that the heart, under sudden emotional duress, races without the necessary time for adaptation, making the heart-brain interaction particularly vulnerable.

The American Journal of Cardiology's report revealed a spike in heart attacks during the stock market crash from September 2008 to March 2009. The gloomy financial news proved to be overwhelming for some individuals, illustrating the tangible impact of emotional stress on cardiac health.

Scientific data, like that from Massachusetts General Hospital, explores the intricate connections between the brain and the heart. An overactive amygdala, a component of the brain deeply embedded in the emotional cortex, has been linked to a higher risk of heart attacks or strokes in the subsequent three to five years. As cardiologists delve into these

scientific realms, the connection between emotions and heart disease is becoming more and more evident. And the dance between heart and emotion prances on.

GENDER DYNAMICS, AGE VARIANCES AND CULTURAL NUANCES

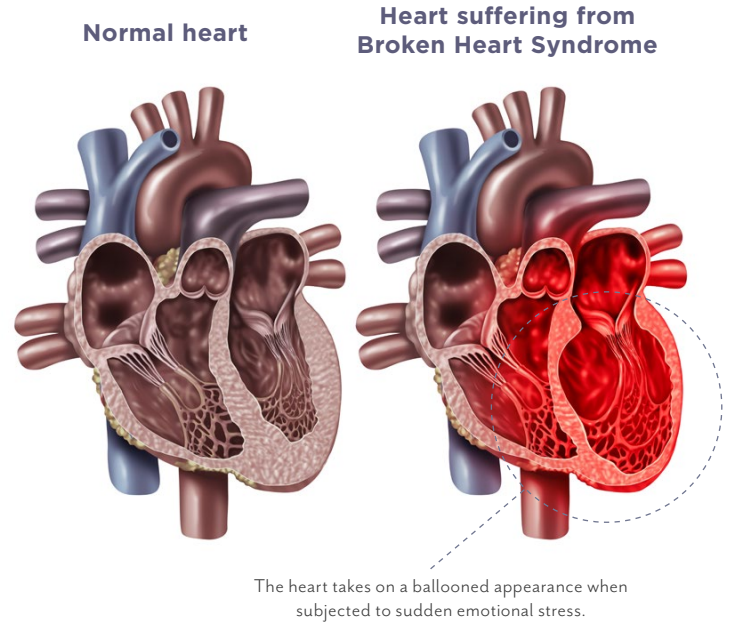
Understanding the heart-mind connection also means looking at how it affects different genders and age groups. Men, when experiencing heart issues, often exhibit dramatic symptoms like chest pain and arm discomfort. In contrast, women, and society at large, may downplay their symptoms, leading to delayed diagnoses. Women's symptoms for heart-related issues are also not always as severe as men's and therefore are sometimes not taken as seriously. Scientific studies, as explained by Dr. Sudhir, suggest that women process happy and sad thoughts differently, with a prolonged response time to particularly sad thoughts which can lead to anxiety and depression, potentially contributing to heart disease.

This duet between the heart and mind isn't solely confined to adulthood; it also manifests in children. Childhood experiences, especially stressful ones, may predict future mental health. Resilience can be developed in children, but it requires supportive family and school environments, comprehensive pediatric care and adult advocacy.

FROM SAD HEARTS TO BROKEN HEARTS

The exploration of cultural nuances in the heart-mind connection is exemplified by Japanese research on "Takotsubo" or Broken Heart Syndrome. This syndrome, aptly named after an octopus trap, reveals itself in X-rays, showcasing the heart's ballooned appearance when subjected to sudden emotional stress. Stress hormones, especially norepinephrine, flood the circulation, predisposing the heart to fatal rhythmic disturbances.

BROKEN HEART SYNDROME





The notion of dying from a broken heart may sound poetic, but it rings true in real-life stories like that of Johnny and June Carter Cash or Debbie Reynolds following the passing of her daughter, actress Carrie Fisher. Dr. Sudhir demystifies this phenomenon, pointing to Sad Heart Syndrome, where depression places severe strain on the heart, potentially leading to heart disease. Broken Heart Syndrome, the more sudden version, is triggered by severe emotional distress, such as hearing about the death of a loved one.

X-rays of the heart during intense emotional moments of Broken Heart Syndrome reveal the previously mentioned ballooning effect, showing the heart muscle being physically affected by the emotional insult of bad news. Electrocardiograms from these moments can resemble a heart attack in which the heart muscle may physically suffer from the emotional blow of bad news.

NAVIGATING THE EMOTIONAL SEAS FOR A HEALTHIER HEART

As science continues to unearth the choreography of this dance between our emotional and physical hearts, it becomes evident that positive influences can also significantly impact heart health. Activities like exercise, meditation and ensuring restful sleep contribute positively to the heart's well-being. The long-term implications of emotional well-being on heart health underscore the need for a comprehensive approach to healthcare. Integrating psychologists and psychiatrists into cardiology clinics is as important as having nutritionists in rehabilitation.

Dr. Sudhir sees a future where psychologists and psychiatrists play integral roles in cardiology clinics, contributing their expertise to understanding and managing the emotional aspects of heart health. The significance of maintaining a work-life balance emerges as a key takeaway. Stressors brought home can detrimentally impact cardiac health, urging individuals to find relaxation and quality time with family and friends. The delicate dance between the heart and mind requires a holistic approach to ensure not just a healthier cardiovascular system but also a richer, more vibrant life.

JUGGLING EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND HEART HEALTH

Achieving a harmonious balance between work and home life is paramount for women seeking to alleviate stress and enhance heart health. One key strategy is effective time management. Prioritize tasks, set realistic goals and learn to delegate responsibilities both at work and home. By establishing clear boundaries and creating dedicated time for family, self-care and work, women can foster a sense of control, reducing the stress that often accompanies juggling multiple roles.

In addition to time management, cultivating a supportive network is crucial. Women should not hesitate to communicate their needs and seek assistance when necessary, whether it be from colleagues at work or family members at home. Sharing responsibilities can alleviate the pressure of trying to do it all alone. Moreover, carving out moments for self-care is essential. Whether it's a short walk, meditation or pursuing a hobby, these activities contribute not only to stress relief but also to overall heart health. Recognizing that personal well-being is an integral part of a successful and fulfilling life, women can embrace the power of balance, fostering a healthy heart and a harmonious existence.



THE ROAD TO A HEALTHY HEART IS PAVED WITH GOOD INTENTIONS AND POSITIVE CHOICES.





STEP BY STEP

Step out for a walk with your partner or your beloved pet, and embrace the heartwarming opportunity to energize both your heart and soul! Just a simple 15-minute stroll can work wonders for your heart health, nurturing your physical well-being. Moreover, this time becomes a serene backdrop for heartfelt conversations with your significant other, enriching your emotional bonds. It's a beautiful way to care for your heart in every sense – physically, emotionally and spiritually.



NURTURING WOMEN'S HEARTS

In the juggling act of women's lives, the synergy between diet, exercise and heart health plays a pivotal role in both emotional and physical well-being. A nutrient-rich diet is the cornerstone of a healthy heart, with specific emphasis on incorporating heart-friendly foods. Women can fortify their cardiovascular health by indulging in a colorful array of fruits and vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains and omega-3 fatty acids. These choices not only contribute to optimal heart function but also provide a solid foundation for emotional well-being, as nutritional deficiencies can impact mood and energy levels.

Complementing a wholesome diet, regular physical activity emerges as a powerful ally in promoting heart health for women. Engaging in aerobic exercises, such as brisk walking, running or swimming, stimulates blood flow, strengthens the heart and helps manage weight—all essential components for a thriving cardiovascular system. Moreover, exercise has been proven to release endorphins, the body's natural mood enhancers, contributing to improved emotional well-being. This means that through certain lifestyle choices you can maintain a healthy heart. This can look like integrating moderate exercise into daily routines, such as taking the stairs or scheduling short walks, which can be remarkably effective. Additionally, finding enjoyable physical activities, like dancing or hiking, not only makes exercise more sustainable but also adds a joyful element to the pursuit of heart health. The synergy between mindful dietary choices and regular physical activity empowers women to proactively shape their lifestyles, fostering not only a resilient heart but also a positive and vibrant emotional state.

KEEP ON DANCING

Our exploration into the intricate dance of the human heart, threading through its anatomy, emotional connections and lifestyle choices, has revealed a profound interplay between our emotional and physical well-being. From understanding the physiological impact of emotional stress on the heart to acknowledging the cultural nuances and age-related variances in this relationship, our journey underscores the complexity of the heart-mind connection. The fusion of science and emotion directs our attention to the importance of positive lifestyle choices—highlighting self-care, exercise and heart-healthy diets—as key factors in fortifying our cardiovascular health and nurturing emotional resilience.

In concluding this journey through the heart's intricate realms, the call to action emerges clear: prioritize balance, self-care and emotional well-being. The delicate dance between our hearts and minds requires a holistic approach, weaving together the scientific and the emotional, the physical and the psychological. As we navigate the seas of our emotional well-being, it becomes evident that the choices we make—from how we manage stress to the foods we consume—impact not only the resilience of our hearts but also the vibrancy of our lives. It's an invitation to embrace a harmonious existence, recognizing that in fortifying the intricate dance between our hearts and minds, we lay the foundation for a healthier, more fulfilling life. So together, let's keep dancing to the music of our hearts.

ENTRYWAYS

- Shake out entry rugs to keep pollen out
- Add doormats on both sides to catch dirt and lawn chemicals
- Create a “No Shoes” policy indoors to keep bacteria outside
- Start a pet care checkpoint with wipes close by for muddy paws

GARAGE

- Inventory chemicals and store them safely away from pilot lights and children
- Safely dispose of old paint and solvents
- Store all gasoline in no-spill containers

LIVING ROOM

- If the sun is shining, open the windows to air out your home
- Switch to a HEPA filter vacuum to help better eliminate dust mites, pet dander and dirt
- Add plants to neutralize air and create oxygen
- Sanitize hand-held devices
- Wash curtains and clean blinds



BATHROOM

- Replace vinyl shower curtains with washable ones
- Ditch store-bought grout cleaner and make your own with baking soda and hydrogen peroxide
- Replace cracked caulk to discourage mold growth
- Wipe down handles, faucets and light switches



tiny tweaks for a
HEALTHIER HOME

It’s impossible to avoid every hazard that life throws our way. From sneaky allergens to hidden chemical exposure, unseen risks exist. Yet, you can make your home a healthier haven for you and your family with a few simple changes. Ready to start? We have your room-by-room checklist right here!



BEDROOMS

- Place dust covers on pillows and mattresses to keep dust mites out
- Let your bed “air out” before making it each day, allowing moisture to evaporate
- Choose chemical-free furnishings with natural fibers

KITCHEN

- Use organic cleaning solutions and safely toss toxic ones
- Filter tap water for drinking
- Recycle BPA-containing plastic containers
- Get rid of hidden germs and bacteria by tossing cracked cutting boards
- Clean food-prep areas thoroughly and often

LAUNDRY ROOM / PET AREA

- Seal pet food to keep pests and rodents away
- Launder pet bedding in hot water to kill fleas naturally
- Clean dryer vents to prevent lint clogs
- Check dryer ventilation to be sure moisture stays outdoors and doesn’t build up indoors



BASEMENT

- Check radon levels
- Schedule an HVAC inspection
- Clean or replace HVAC filters every three months
- If you have a sump pump, be sure it’s operational

UNLOCKING THE SWEET SECRET:
THE ART OF
SUGARING



If you haven’t heard of the hair removal method that is sweeping the internet, don’t turn the page yet. Sugaring is an all-natural hair removal method that’s extra gentle on skin, leaving you silky smooth for weeks.

What’s in the “Sugar”?

The sugaring paste is a mixture of lemon juice, water and sugar. The ingredients are boiled together to create a paste. The sugar acts as an adhesive to bind and pull the hair follicles from the root. The citric acid from the lemon juice provides antibacterial properties and keeps the sugar from crystallizing. Finally, the water helps to make the paste the perfect consistency for spreading easily while still having the right stickiness for gently removing hair.

All the Sweet Benefits

* *All-Natural* - Other waxing products contain oils, resin and additives that can cause skin irritation and damage.

* *Great for Sensitive Skin* - The sugaring paste does not adhere to the skin, only the hair follicles and dead skin cells. This, plus the gentler nature of the ingredients, makes sugaring ideal for sensitive skin.

* *Fewer In-Grown Hairs* - Sugaring pulls the opposite as waxing. Wax goes on with the hair growth and is pulled off against the growth which causes more hair to break and remain in the skin.

* *Lasts Longer* - Pulling the sugar off with hair growth allows for the entire hair follicle to be removed, giving you long-lasting, smooth and silky skin.

* *Easy Clean-Up* - Wax is hard to remove all the way, often leaving you sticky for the rest of the day. Since the sugaring paste is water soluble, warm water completely removes it.

Sugaring might just be the next hair removal craze, but it may be worth a shot. Many salons offer this service—just be sure to properly vet where you choose to book an appointment, making sure that it is a reputable and trusted salon. Always be sure to check with your Franciscan dermatologist before changing your skincare regimen or mixing a new product with your current medications.



Looking for a Dermatologist?
Scan the QR code to make an appointment!

CONSIDERATIONS
BEFORE SUGARING

* *Everyone is Different* - Each person’s skin is different and can react differently—consider your skin’s temperament before trying sugaring.

* *Sugaring Lasts 3-6 Weeks* - Results vary per the individual, but the more regularly it is done the thinner and softer the hair regrows.

* *DIY is Difficult* - There are a lot of variables in making the paste such as the temperature and the technique, which makes this method challenging to do in the comfort of your own home.

* *Careful of Chemicals and Sun* - As with most hair removal techniques, take care not to apply harsh chemicals or products to your skin and stay out of the sun for a few days as the pores are wide open after removal and more susceptible to infection and irritation.



SWEET AFFECTION

UNWRAPPING THE HISTORICAL BOND BETWEEN CHOCOLATE AND LOVE

In the rich tapestry of nurturing and care that defines our journey toward wholeness, chocolate stands out as a beacon of comfort and a symbol of love. This humble yet heavenly treat, rooted in ancient tradition, has blossomed through the ages into a universal emblem of affection and wellness. By exploring chocolate's relationship with love, we unwrap the layers of chocolate's journey as a source of universal joy and connection.

CACAO BEGINNINGS:

The journey of chocolate begins in the lush rainforests of ancient Mesoamerica, a treasure of the indigenous civilizations that first cultivated the cacao tree. Esteemed as a gift from the gods, chocolate was initially savored as a frothy, bitter beverage and a luxury for the elite. As chocolate crossed oceans to Europe in the 1600s, it was embraced by the aristocracy.

Chocolate became intertwined with courtship and a symbol of social standing. In an era where sugar was a rare indulgence, chocolate's exclusivity was further amplified, solidifying its status as a delicacy reserved for the upper echelons of society, far beyond the reach of the common man. In the grand ballrooms and silent corners of European courts, chocolate was more than a mere delicacy—it was a silent language of intent and affection. It wove its way into courtship rituals, becoming a sophisticated part of social interplay and a valued guest at weddings, symbolizing wealth and prosperity. Over time, chocolate transitioned from a rarefied luxury to a cherished token of love, recognized and embraced by all as a sweet gesture of romance and commitment.

THE SWEET SCIENCE OF AFFECTION:

Science offers a fascinating glimpse into why chocolate might tug at the heartstrings. Packed with compounds like phenylethylamine and tryptophan,

chocolate has the potential to elevate mood and perhaps even mimic the exhilaration of love. Yet, while the myth of chocolate as an aphrodisiac abounds in popular culture, scientific scrutiny tells a more nuanced tale. It is not chocolate, but the act of giving that is tied to love. This long-standing tradition of giving and receiving chocolate, enriched by psychological layers of pleasure and anticipation, plays into the intricate dance of human emotion and connection, weaving chocolate indelibly into the fabric of romantic gestures.

HUGS AND KISSES:

With the dawn of the 20th century, chocolate was reinvented—from an exotic drink to the sweet, solid delights akin to what we enjoy today. Pioneers like Milton Hershey not only made chocolate accessible but also infused it with cultural significance, as seen with the creation of the iconic Hershey's KISSES™ during Valentine's Day. Since then, the bond between chocolate and love has sweetened with time, with offerings of heart-shaped boxes and personalized messages becoming a modern-day lexicon of love. Chocolate, in its myriad of forms, continues to be a universal token of affection, ingrained in our celebrations of love and togetherness.

LOVE'S DIVERSE FLAVORS:

The allure of chocolate transcends borders, adapting and merging with cultural tapestries around the globe. Each society has spun its own narrative of the chocolate and love duo, from Japan's White Day, where men reciprocate Valentine's Day gifting, to Ghana's National Chocolate Day, aligning with Valentine's Day to celebrate its status as a world-leading cacao producer. In Western cultures, chocolate has become almost

synonymous with romantic occasions, lavishly consumed during love-related celebrations. The portrayal of chocolate within the arts—such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* or *Chocolat*—has solidified its gleeful and romantic symbolism. Media and advertising further embellish this sentiment, portraying chocolate as an indispensable companion to love's every whim, thereby nurturing a global narrative that binds the two ever closer.

Through centuries and across continents, chocolate has evolved into a universal emblem of affection, a sweet consort to love's varied expressions. It has been a witness to silent confessions and grand gestures alike, becoming ingrained in the cultural conception of love. As we look towards the future, chocolate's role within the domain of love seems only poised to grow richer, mirroring our own ever-evolving expressions of affection. Whether as a whispered

promise in a piece of dark chocolate or the joyous celebration in a shared confection, chocolate remains a steadfast tribute to love's enduring power. As it continues to inspire and comfort, one can only imagine the new traditions and innovations that will unfold in the delicious narrative of chocolate and love.

FUN FACT

There's a KISS shape hidden in the Hersey's KISSES logo.



Spiced Chocolate Fondue

Stoke the flames of affection with a pot of our Spiced Chocolate Fondue, the perfect recipe for kindling love and warmth.

PREP: 10 minutes • COOK: 30 minutes • SERVES: 4-6

Directions

- 1 | **USE A SMALL SAUCEPAN** to combine heavy cream, milk and all of the spices. Bring mixture to a boil, remove from heat and let steep for 20 minutes.
- 2 | **STRAIN CREAM MIXTURE** into a bowl and wipe out saucepan. Return cream to the saucepan and bring to a boil. Put the chopped chocolate in the bowl and pour the boiling cream mixture over it. Let stand for 3 minutes, whisk until smooth. Transfer to a fondue pot, or other hot plate, and serve! Stir the chocolate mixture regularly over low heat to keep the consistency.

MIX & MATCH MAGIC

Personalizing Your Perfect Fondue Experience

- | FRUITY DELIGHTS: | SWEET TREATS: | SAVORY TREATS: |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Banana slices• Apple slices• Orange slices• Strawberries• Pineapple chunks• Cherries• Raspberries• Blackberries• Kiwi slices | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Marshmallows• Waffles• Churros• Croissants• Pound cake• Sponge cake | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pretzels• Bacon strips• Graham crackers• Salted nuts• Potato Chips |

Ingredients

- 1½ cups heavy cream
- ¼ cup whole milk
- 8 - 4 in. cinnamon sticks, crushed
- 2 tsp. cardamom pods
- 1 tsp. whole cloves
- 1 tsp. black peppercorns
- ½ tsp. ground ginger
- ½ tsp. nutmeg, freshly grated
- ½ lb. bittersweet chocolate, coarsely chopped



We want to hear from you!

Inspiring Women would love to feature your favorite recipes in future issues! Visit inspiringwomen.org/share-recipe or scan the QR code to submit your favorite tried and true dishes!

WAYS TO LOWER YOUR Resting Heart Rate

A lower resting heart rate means your body's pumping blood efficiently. A higher resting heart rate means your heart's working harder to circulate blood.

When it comes to hearts, working hard isn't what we want. **A normal resting heart rate for adults is between 60 and 100 beats per minute.** Anything higher means your heart has to break a sweat to keep blood pumping, and that's a bad sign.

If your heart rate is high, try some of these simple tips to lower it.

5 Ways to Lower Your Resting Heart Rate

MORE EXERCISE Yes, your heart rate temporarily rises when you exercise — but just like how bodybuilders put stress on their muscles to gain strength, exercising can strengthen your heart. Cardio-based workouts are especially effective at lowering your resting heart rate.

LESS STRESS It's easier said than done, but one of the best ways to lower blood pressure is to reduce the amount of stress in your life. To start, look for little sources of stress that you can cut from your life without consequence.

MORE FISH A study by the American Heart Association showed that more fish in your diet leads to a lower resting heart rate. If foods like salmon and tuna don't suit your taste, talk to a medical professional about fish oil supplements instead.

LESS HEAT When your environment is hot, your heart has to work harder to produce sweat and keep your skin cool. If your heart rate leans high, seek out cooler temperatures and drink lots of water.

BETTER BREATHING Daily breathing exercises can improve your resting heart rate. Breathe slowly through your nose for five seconds, hold it for just a moment then exhale very slowly for fifteen seconds. Do this for five minutes a day, and the results will come in time.

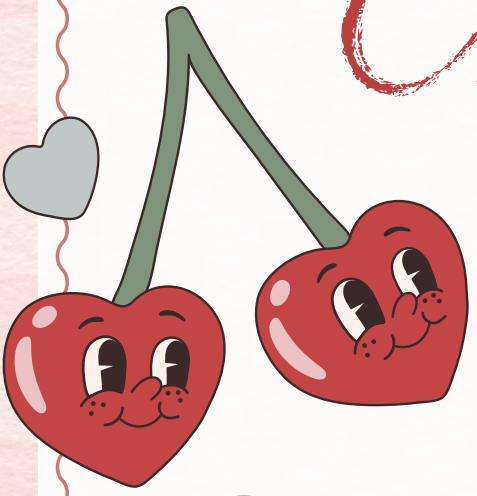
How Low Is Too Low?

The human heart can become incredibly efficient at pumping blood. For example, champion cyclist Lance Armstrong was said to have a resting heart rate of 32 beats per minute in his prime. It's perfectly possible (and healthy) to achieve low resting heart rates with due time and dedication to fitness.

When your resting heart rate suddenly drops lower than normal, you should seek immediate attention from a healthcare professional. An abrupt plunge in beats per minute is typically the symptom of a dangerous medical episode.

YOUR ULTIMATE Galentine's Day Guide

BRUNCH,
BONDING &
BEYOND



Galentine's Day has transcended fiction and become a beloved tradition for women to honor their gal pals. In the spirit of unity and sisterhood, let's delve into the history of Galentine's Day, explore engaging activities, whip up a fun snack and reflect on the profound importance of female friendships.

The History Behind the Fun

Galentine's Day, celebrated on February 13th, has been a term thrown around for about a decade now... but where did it come from? A fictional character on NBC's *Parks and Recreation* named Leslie Knope, played by Amy Poehler, actually invented it and coined it as a day of "ladies celebrating ladies." Of course it's a play off of Valentine's Day, but catered to celebrating the friendships of your girlfriends. Whether it is a girls-only breakfast outing or a cozy movie night, making sure to let your friends know they are loved and appreciated is all there is to it.

Planning an Unforgettable Galentine's

- ♥ **Don't Overthink It** - Hanging out with your girlfriends shouldn't cause you stress. The presence of all your gals together is the real present! Don't put unnecessary pressure on yourself.
- ♥ **Consider Your Company** - If you have different groups of friends, think through who gets along with who. You want to have an enjoyable time and not have to worry about potential tiffs or awkward moments.
- ♥ **Define Expectations** - Whether you are hanging at home in pajamas or dressing up to go dancing, make sure you communicate your plans clearly so everyone is comfortable, not under or over dressed and they know what to expect.
- ♥ **Food Sensitivities & Allergies** - Take care to note if you have someone attending that has a food aversion. It is a small gesture that means a lot to someone who is often left out when it comes to snacks and treats.



Possibilities For Your Festivities

- ♥ **Brunch Extravaganza** - Gather your gal pals for a brunch filled with laughter and delicious treats. Create a DIY mimosa bar, stock up on pastries and indulge in a feast of love and friendship.
- ♥ **Crafting and Creativity** - Unleash your inner artist with a crafting session. Whether it's making personalized cards, creating friendship bracelets or embarking on a collaborative art project, let your creativity flow as you bond with your friends.
- ♥ **Movie Marathon** - Dive into a cinematic celebration with a movie marathon featuring your favorite chick flicks or empowering films. Snuggle up with blankets and popcorn for a cozy and entertaining day.
- ♥ **Spa Day at Home** - Pamper yourselves with a spa day at home. DIY face masks, manicures and relaxation are sure to rejuvenate the mind, body and spirit, fostering an atmosphere of self-care and camaraderie.
- ♥ **Chick Flick Popcorn Mix** - Mix up your favorite popcorn with pretzels and colorful candies. Add a sprinkle of edible glitter for a touch of glam. This snack is perfect for a laid-back movie night with your besties.
- ♥ **Bubbly Bliss Mimosa Bar** - Elevate your gathering with a mimosa bar featuring a selection of fruit juices, sparkling options as well as fresh herbs and fruits. Let your gal pals customize their own refreshing drinks, creating a fun and interactive experience that adds a sparkling touch to your celebration. Cheers to friendship and bubbly bliss!



- ♥ **Love-Struck Fruit Kabobs** - Thread juicy strawberries and your other favorite berries onto skewers for a simple and refreshing treat. Add a dollop of whipped cream on top, or drizzle them with dark chocolate for an extra touch of sweetness. These heart-shaped kabobs are a delightful symbol of your affection for your girls.
- ♥ **EmpowerMINT Chocolate-Dipped Pretzel Rods** - Dip pretzel rods into mint-infused dark chocolate and sprinkle with crushed candy canes or edible glitter for a festive touch. These crunchy and sweet treats are perfect for celebrating the empowering spirit of female friendships.
- ♥ **Galentine's Trail Mix** - Create a custom trail mix with a mix of nuts, dried fruits, chocolate-covered pretzels and heart-shaped candies. Package them in individual bags with personalized tags for a sweet and portable snack your friends can enjoy throughout the day.
- ♥ **Cupcake Fondue Delight** - Bake mini cupcakes and provide an assortment of dipping options such as melted chocolate, caramel and colorful sprinkles. Your girlfriends can indulge in the joy of cupcake fondue, creating their own delightful combinations.
- ♥ **Sassy S'more Pops** - Skewer marshmallows and dip them in melted chocolate, then roll them in crushed graham crackers or sprinkles. These sassy s'more pops bring the classic campfire treat to your Galentine's Day celebration in a fun and bite-sized form.
- ♥ **Divine Crepe Delight** - Whisk up a batch of homemade crepes for a Galentine's Day treat that's as versatile as your friendships. Whether filled with sweet Nutella and fresh berries or savory spinach and feta, delicate crepes offer a delightful culinary canvas for your soul sisters to savor and customize together.



The Importance of Female Friendships

Female friendships are the tapestry of our lives, woven with threads of empathy, understanding and shared experiences. These connections are essential, providing comfort, laughter and a profound sense of belonging. In a world that often emphasizes romantic relationships, Galentine's Day reminds us of the unique and valuable bond between women. As we celebrate, let's recognize the power of female friendships to inspire, uplift and foster personal growth.

From offering a shoulder to cry on, keeping secrets, patient listening, giving advice and boosting self-esteem, to developing healthy and strong friendships—investing in these relationships is something all women can benefit from.

Galentine's Gabfest

- A few prompts to help break the ice and get to know your girlfriends better!
- ♥ **Two Truths and a Lie:** Each person shares three statements about themselves—two truths and one lie. The others in the group try to guess which statement is the lie.
- ♥ **Compliment Circle:** Sit in a circle. Create a positive and uplifting environment by having each person give a compliment to the person on their right.
- ♥ **Favorite Things:** Spark conversations and reveal common interests by having everyone take one minute to share their favorite thing (like a book, movie or food) from the past year.

6 Things Making Your Dry Skin Worse

We all have our unique bouts with skin care. From the simple four step nightly routine to whole evenings dedicated to skin care and healing, we care about our skin. Not just about the way it looks, but we care about the way our skin helps us feel. Soft and relaxed skin helps our whole bodies rest at ease. But sometimes no matter what kind of moisturizer or routine, it feels like you just can't shake dry or irritated skin. Here are a few things that could be causing it so you can look out for them in your own life.

1. Bathing & Scrubbing

Bathing more than once a day or taking long showers or baths can remove the natural oils in our skin, causing dryness to rear its ugly head. The water and the scrubbing wipes away our natural moisturizers. Our bodies can only produce them so quickly, so it's important to give your skin time to recuperate before scrubbing it down again.

2. Harsh Soaps & Detergents

Adding to the hazards of washing too much, soap itself can cause increased dryness in your skin. Soaps, detergents and shampoos are all designed to strip moisture from your body and wipe away oils. This is why it's so important to let your natural oils have a chance to moisturize your skin a bit before bathing again.

3. Environment & Heat

Unlike most of our body, our skin is almost always exposed to the world around us. The environmental extremes that we experience can have an effect on drying our skin. Hot temperatures like standing next to a campfire or stove can dry out your skin, but so can windy days in the winter where you can barely feel your cheeks. Both of these extremes reduce humidity, which is how our bodies naturally moisturize.

4. Aging

As we get older, our skin grows with us. Our skin begins to thin and produce less of the oils needed to moisturize naturally. This is because the oil is used to help the skin retain moisture, but with less skin and less oil, less moisture can be absorbed.

5. Medical Treatments

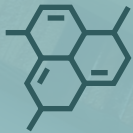
Many medications, surgeries and treatments for various health conditions can cause skin changes. It's common for many medications to cause dry or irritated skin since the body tries to detox by sweating out any foreign bodies, leaving the skin exposed. It may sound awful, but it is usually minor and can be minimized by various skin care routines.

6. External Skin Condition

People with diagnosed skin conditions will be more prone to dry skin. Conditions such as atopic dermatitis (eczema) or psoriasis are more likely to experience dry and irritated skin because of the nature of their conditions. They are also more prone to the other triggers of dry skin, so take special care to watch out for the signs.

Proper skin care is a constantly evolving, dynamic process. Keeping a keen eye on your skin and everything it's being exposed to can be as simple as taking a shower in the morning rather than before you go to bed. These little changes in our lifestyle can help keep your skin happy and healthy.

Fun Facts ABOUT YOUR SKIN



The skin is the body's largest organ accounting for roughly **16%** of a person's body weight.



Skin has a remarkable ability to regenerate itself. Every **28 days** your skin renews itself.



Your skin is **64%** water, so when the body is dehydrated, you are more susceptible to wrinkling and other signs of aging.

GYNECOLOGY

ASK AN EXPERT



Dr. John Monk, DO
FPN OB/GYN
Crown Point

.....
Wish your doctor was on speed dial? We talked with some experts at Franciscan Health to answer your most pressing questions. This is what they had to say!

FIND A
FRANCISCAN DOC



1. **Can you explain how a Pap smear works and how often I need one?**

A Pap smear is a simple test where I'll gently collect some cells from your cervix using a small brush or spatula. It's done to check for any changes or abnormalities that could indicate cervical cancer. As for how often, it's usually recommended every three years starting at age 21, but we might do it more often based on your medical history or if previous tests had unusual results.

2. **Is it normal to experience pain during intercourse?**

Well, it's not uncommon, but it's definitely not something you should just put up with. Pain during sex can be caused by lots of different things like lack of lubrication, an infection, endometriosis or even psychological factors. If it's happening to you, let's chat about it in more detail so we can figure out the cause and get you feeling comfortable again.

3. **What are the signs of a hormonal imbalance?**

Hormonal imbalances can show up in a few ways. You might notice irregular periods, unexpected weight gain or loss, mood swings, fatigue or skin changes like acne. If you're having any of these symptoms, it's a good idea to talk about it, and we can run some tests to see what's going on and get you back in balance.



Have questions you'd like to see answered in future issues? Visit inspiringwomen.org/ask-a-doc or scan the QR and submit them today!



STEP INTO MOTHERHOOD WITH THE BEST

When the family is about to grow by two feet, you've got a whole team ready to help you find your footing. Franciscan Health's labor and delivery specialists take all the steps to motherhood with you – from prenatal to postnatal, and every step in between, including advanced care for high-risk pregnancies and breastfeeding support services.

Step into your new role as mom with confidence!
Choose your OB/GYN today.



Franciscan HEALTH

FranciscanHealth.org

PRAYING A LITTLE DEEPER

The Hour of Prayer

While finding where to start can be difficult, just remember that when you are talking to God there's no wrong answer. How freeing is that? Your Father wants to hear everything we have on our hearts. The more we share, the more vulnerable and honest we become, and in turn, the deeper our relationship grows with Him.

Sister, you are not alone in your struggle to stay committed to a discipline of prayer. In fact, many fellow believers admit that their prayer life does not look like they want it to. The hour of prayer may seem daunting, however, it simplifies and utilizes 12 different specific ways to pray. Simply pray on each section for five minutes, then you can let go and move to the next section. Each section even has scripture linked to it to read through, to help guide your prayer.

HERE'S A BREAKDOWN OF WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE:

- 1 PRAISE** - PSALM 22:3; PSALM 63:3; HEBREWS 13:15
Start this time by remembering how big and glorious God is, and recall all the incredible things He has done!
- 2 FOCUS** - 2 CORINTHIANS 3:16-18
Let your mind release everything it is holding onto, and focus your thoughts on God.
- 3 CONFESSION** - PSALM 139:23-24; PSALM 51
Use Psalm 51 to guide you through confessing sins that are heavy on your heart.
- 4 PRAY THE WORD** - JEREMIAH 23:29-30
Declare the promises and truths that the Word gives us as children of God.
- 5 WATCHING** - ROMANS 8:26-27
Pray what comes to your mind, there's no right or wrong thing to pray about.
- 6 INTERCESSION** - 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-2; MATTHEW 9:37-38
Pray for those who don't know God—for those lost and searching for answers.
- 7 PETITION** - JAMES 4:2-3; MATTHEW 6:9-13
Ask the Lord for the things you need, and focus on asking Him to further align your heart with His.
- 8 THANKSGIVING** - PHILIPPIANS 4:6
Thank God for what He has already done and what He has promised yet to do.
- 9 SINGING** - PSALM 100:2; EPHESIANS 5:19
Play a favorite hymn or worship song and let your heart sing out with it!
- 10 MEDITATION** - JOSHUA 1:8; PHILIPPIANS 4:8
Let your thoughts refocus on God, and reflect on the things you have just prayed for.
- 11 LISTENING** - JOHN 5:19-20; ISAIAH 50:4-5
Be open to revelations about yourself or the world, and be mindful of your thoughts as you open yourself up to God.
- 12 PRAISE** - ISAIAH 65:24; PSALM 52:9
Finish as you started: glorify and thank God for this time you've spent with Him.

Building a Meaningful Community

A Support System for the Soul

“²³ Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” - Hebrews 10:23-25, NIV

Regardless of how extroverted or introverted you are, God made you to be with people. You were wired to be part of something bigger than yourself. This gives us all an innate desire for intimacy in many different shapes and sizes. But, where do you start? We don’t have the structure of school or classes to force us into friendships like we did when we were younger. How do we make lasting friendships and find a sense of secure intimacy with others in such a fast-paced world? Here are some ways to start building a community rich with deep relationships and genuine friendships.

Getting Involved

One of the easiest places to find a healthy community is by doing something with others that you love. This could be a sports team, a public hobby group, serving within your church or town or maybe walking your local trails. By getting out of your home and engaging with people who enjoy the same things you do, you have a better chance of meeting people who can be a part of your community. Check Facebook for groups in your city that have hobbies or topics you enjoy.

You can also find a fellowship group through your church. Meeting with other believers in a similar phase of life to you, outside of Sunday service, is a great shortcut to making new friends. However, we know it can be hard to create time for new events in our busy lives. Here are some ways to help prioritize building community in your life.

Carving Out Dedicated Time

There’s no getting around the fast-paced nature of the world we live in. As soon as one task or event ends, it’s on to the next, often with overlap and very little time to breathe in between. We are constantly forced to make decisions and prioritize one thing over the next. The first step in building a community for yourself is recognizing how to prioritize it. This is something that will take time and effort, especially as you start, it may feel like you are seeing little to no fruit from all your efforts. A meaningful community finds ways to support each other even in the midst of our busiest seasons.

Side-by-Side Friendships

Not every friendship needs to start in an organized coffee meeting every Tuesday morning before work. In fact, it’s often easier to take a “side-by-side” approach to making new friends. This means including others in your busy life. Invite friends and other families to the events that you are already involved in. Choose to do life together! Instead of the kids’

baseball game pulling you away from deepening friendships, invite those friends to come to the game with you! Or maybe you have to make dinner for the family and stay home while the kids go to bed. Invite friends and their families to join you! They can even bring a dish to help take some of the cooking load off of you! Including others in your family and home life may be intimidating, but it is one of the easiest and most genuine ways to show friends who you truly are.

Finding Courage to be Vulnerable

Now, you may be thinking that it’s too personal or too invasive to include someone in your life like that so quickly. However, is running your kids to and from school, sports and clubs every day not an important part of your life? This hesitation you may be feeling comes from a fear of vulnerability.

What happens when they see me struggling? What if my hair’s not fixed? What will they think if the laundry is still on the couch? Is this outfit too formal? Do I need to be more casual? What if I’m not good enough for them?

Trust me sister, you are not alone in these anxieties. In fact, the people that you are worried about impressing are probably having similar thoughts. The best thing you can do to build real, meaningful relationships is to allow yourself to be vulnerable with others. If you’re having someone over for dinner, the house does not have to be in perfect condition. If you’re meeting a friend for coffee, you don’t have to look like the most recent issue of *Vogue*. It’s okay to let your imperfections show a bit. Nobody is perfect. Pretending to be can be devastating and exhausting. Let others see the real you, including the occasional frizzy hair or dirty dishes in the sink, because there’s nothing wrong with the real you. You and what you feel are imperfections, are still worthy of love and friendship.

Extending the Olive Branch

The next step in being vulnerable is being honest in conversation. It doesn’t need to be all the time, or even often. But allow your conversations with friends to carry farther than, “What did you do this week?” Have intentional conversations about heart posture and general well-being. Having deep conversations about the hardships of life not only creates unique relationships but also helps build you up. Just as Hebrews 10:24 says, we can spur each other on toward love. Open yourself up to talking about

CONTINUE READING ►►►





things that you are struggling with. Maybe there's an aspect of your spiritual life that's bothering you or your significant other just doesn't seem to be treating you the same way that they used to. However big or small, opening up can be like an olive branch, extending an offering of peace and vulnerability, to show that you are looking for an enriching relationship. The reality is that most people are looking for that olive branch, so when you present it, you will likely find that they also have an olive branch to extend to you.

Serving Others

Conversation is not the only way to build genuine relationships, however. Finding ways to demonstrate you care for another person is a great way to express yourself, especially if you don't feel like you are good at articulating your thoughts with words. This could be small things like offering to help clean up at an event, or even a card to express your appreciation for them hosting. It will vary from person to person and event to event what kind of service you can do to show your appreciation. More intimate friendships may look more

like helping someone finish laundry or take care of yard work! Or, simply bring a cup of coffee for someone when you know they've had it rough recently. Understanding what kinds of ways you prefer to express love and appreciation will help you do so more often.

Maybe you're willing to take this a step further and serve in your church or greater community area! Volunteer to rock babies in the nursery. Or maybe being on the kitchen clean-up crew is more your style. Look up the non-profits in your area. Most towns have a pregnancy resource center, a homeless shelter, a foster community, a prison ministry, kids outreach programs, etc. that you can plug into. What is your passion? Turn that passion into a community you can serve alongside! You may be surprised at just how many things there are that you can do to build relationships outside of conversation-based interaction!

Be Present

Maybe everything else feels like too big of a step right now. That's okay. Don't rush into something if you're too uncomfortable to be yourself. Maybe rather than jumping head-first into something, you can take it a little slower. Test the waters a bit.

Go to events and be present. That's all your first step has to be. Make some conversation, add input to group discussions or simply smile and wave! Starting to attend events and meetings whether through church or a different community is a great step to take. All you need to do is take it one step at a time, and before you know it, you'll have opportunities to make deeper connections and real friendships.

Bring it to God

Sister, this is a lot of information to process. The reality is that there are so many ways to begin to build friendships and community that will provide lasting genuine support for you and your family. In all of this, it's easy to get caught up in what we are doing and end up leaving God out of the picture.

The words of Philippians 4:6-7 remind us, *"6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"* (NIV). Take time to pray through these ideas. Talk to God about your desires for a strong community. Lament to Him if you feel anger or resentment for not already having deep friendships to rely on. Keep God in the conversation and He will guide your heart to the things you need.

One final thought for these challenging endeavors, is that you are never alone. Almost everyone else in the world is looking for friends that they can rely on. Friends that they can have a laugh with. And friends that they can walk through life together with. However, even more than that, sister, God is always with you. He will hold your hand when social anxiety feels overwhelming. Lean on His guidance as you pursue building a meaningful support system for your soul. ●

Chocolate Lava Cake for Two

Embark on a culinary romance with this simple chocolate lava cake recipe. Crafted for everyone from starry-eyed lovers to dessert devotees alike, this warm cake is sure to bring joy to your heart.

PREP: 10 minutes • **COOK:** 12-14 minutes • **SERVES:** 2

Directions

- 1 | **PREHEAT OVEN** to 425°F and butter a 10-ounce ramekin, or two 6-ounce ramekins. Dust the ramekin with granulated sugar.
- 2 | **COMBINE CHOCOLATE AND BUTTER** in a heat-safe bowl and set over a pan of simmering water. Cook to melt, stirring occasionally, until melted and smooth. Remove from heat and set aside.
- 3 | **USE A MEDIUM BOWL** to combine sugar, egg, egg yolk, vanilla and salt. Whisk together until mixture becomes thick, about 2 minutes. Whisk in flour until smooth.
- 4 | **ADD CHOCOLATE** to the egg mixture and gently stir until combined.
- 5 | **POUR MIXTURE** into prepared ramekin(s). Bake for 12 to 14 minutes, or 7 to 9 minutes if you're using two ramekins, or until the edges are puffed while the center is still soft when pressed.
- 6 | **USE A SMALL KNIFE** to loosen edges of cake from ramekin. Put a plate over the ramekin and invert, while still warm. Use an oven mitt to lift ramekin from the cake. Dust the cake with confectioners' sugar and serve immediately with ice cream or whipped cream.

PRO TIP: You can make the batter one day ahead. Just add a minute or two to your bake time.



We want to hear from you!

Inspiring Women would love to feature your favorite recipes in future issues! Visit inspiringwomen.org/share-recipe or scan the QR code to submit your favorite tried and true dishes!



Ingredients

- **3 oz.** bittersweet chocolate, 70 to 74 percent cacao (not chips), chopped (about ½ cup)
- **3 Tb.** unsalted butter, cut into cubes, plus more for the ramekin(s)
- **3 Tb.** granulated sugar, plus more for the ramekin(s)
- **1 large** egg
- **1 large** egg yolk
- ½ **tsp.** vanilla extract
- ⅛ **tsp.** kosher salt
- **2 Tb.** all-purpose flour
- **A sprinkle** of confectioners' sugar, to serve (optional)

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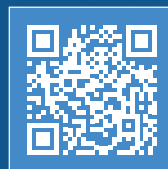
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