



Celebrate Heart Health Month

with Friends, Family and a Romantic Twist

February isn't just for Valentine's Day — it's also Heart Health Month! It's the perfect time to focus on nurturing your physical and emotional wellbeing while connecting with loved ones. Did you know heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the U.S.? But the good news is that small lifestyle changes can significantly impact your heart health outcomes.

Here are some simple and meaningful ideas to celebrate your heart and encourage those around you to do the same:

Spread the Love in Your Community

Share on social media how you're working with friends or family to be heart-healthy and encourage others to do the same. Posting tips and raising awareness about heart disease can inspire others to take charge of their wellness. You might also consider organizing a community event like a heart-health fundraiser walk with your local recreation and fitness centers. Additionally, signing a social support contract can be

a meaningful way to partner with loved ones and stay accountable for heart-healthy habits, such as regular exercise or preparing nutritious meals together.

Nourish Your Heart with Smart Nutrition

Good nutrition is key to heart health. Getting in the habit of choosing fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins can help lower cholesterol, reduce blood pressure, and improve overall cardiovascular wellness. To make nutrition fun and engaging, consider attending an online cooking class to learn new healthy recipes or signing your kids up for one to inspire lifelong healthy eating habits. Share your favorite recipes with friends or family or host a virtual recipe swap to exchange ideas.

Add a Romantic Twist for Valentine's Day

Make your Valentine's Day celebration heart friendly. Cook a romantic, candlelit dinner together featuring heart-friendly ingredients like roasted vegetables, whole grains and a glass

of red wine (in moderation!). Finish with a delicious dessert packed with antioxidants: strawberries dipped in dark chocolate! Or why not take a lovely sunset walk or enjoy a fun outdoor activity together? It's a great way to strengthen your bond and keep your hearts happy. Valentine's Day also presents a great opportunity to plan future heart-healthy dates like hiking, dancing or practicing stress-relief techniques as a couple, such as yoga or meditation.

Your heart works hard for you every day — this February, take time to return the love. Whether you're cooking a romantic dinner, focusing on your nutrition, or simply sharing heart-health tips, every small moment is an opportunity to make big improvements in your heart health. By celebrating Heart Health Month, you can inspire others to prioritize their wellbeing too!

"American Heart Month", nhlbi.nih.gov., Dec. 4, 2024.



The 2-2-2-2 Relationship Rule

If you're craving togetherness with your significant other — whether you're newlyweds or in a decades-strong match — odds are favorable they are feeling similarly. This February, infuse your closest relationship with a little more love. Healthy, strong, resilient relationships can be an important piece of the overall wellbeing puzzle, for many reasons. They:

- Boost mental and physical wellbeing
- Reduce stress
- Increase longevity

In lieu of Valentine's Day this year, try the **2-2-2-2** rule to fortify your most meaningful partnership. The **2-2-2-2** relationship rule is a gentle itinerary for intentional together-time to support healthy, thriving love. It's a customizable and utterly flexible format for you and the most important human in your life to fill in together. It creates memories, boosts communication, nurtures your natural connection and helps you continue to grow and learn together. Here's a look at what it suggests:

- Intimacy **2** times per week: Did you know? There are 10 different forms of intimacy or more!
- Date night **2** times per month: Experiment with budget-friendly (or even free) date-night or date-night-in ideas!
- Night away from home together every **2** months: You can keep it local and avoid travel time! Plan it together or make it a surprise; the change of scenery and a short adventure together can help you both reset. Let the buzz of daily routines melt away with extended time devoted to one another.
- Vacation together every **2** years: With ample planning time, you and your partner can catch great

travel deals and check off a destination on that bucket list together!

The **2-2-2-2** rule helps couples regularly prioritize each other. However, with every yin is a yang and it's helpful to be aware of potential pitfalls. Keep these special considerations in mind:

- The **2-2-2-2** rule doesn't fit quite as easily in the realm of far-away partners. For long-distance closeness, try virtual date nights — playing online board games together to virtual date games, cooking lessons or wine tasting; create shared experiences like reading the same book; plan upcoming visits and reciprocate.
- Remember to remain flexible. Life happens — especially when it's made more complex with dynamics like raising a family or caring for aging parents. If you miss a date night due to unforeseen circumstances, keep your focus on the greater goal. There will be more date nights and perhaps you make the follow-up date night extra special.
- Make sure to discuss all projected financial impacts together. Financial stress is a common cause for discourse in close relationships; be sure to connect with your partner to ensure you're on the same page.

If we are lucky enough to find a compatible partner whom we willingly cherish over the long-term, sometimes the gentle reminder of an evening designated for togetherness is all we need to ensure our most valued relationship flourishes. Let the **2-2-2-2** rule set a new rhythm for your love. Happy dating!

"Is the 2-2-2-2 Rule the Secret to Having a Healthy Long-Term Relationship?" LaKeisha Flemming, [verywellmind.com](https://www.verywellmind.com), Oct. 1, 2024.

Fudgy Gluten-Free Valentine's Day Brownies



Prep Time: 10 minutes • Cook Time: 25 minutes • Total: 35 minutes
Serves: 12 brownies

Ingredients

- 1 cup tahini, well-stirred (or sub with creamy cashew butter)
- ½ cup pure maple syrup
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ⅓ cup cocoa powder
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ cup chocolate chips or chopped walnuts (use Enjoy Life® brand chocolate chips for dairy-free option)

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F and line an 8x8-inch baking pan with parchment paper.
2. In a large bowl, combine the tahini, maple syrup, eggs and vanilla; whisk the mixture well to combine. Add the cocoa powder, baking powder and salt; use a wooden spoon or rubber spatula to stir until the mixture is smooth.
3. Fold in the chocolate chips (or walnuts) and transfer the mixture to the prepared baking pan. Bake for 24 to 26 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out mostly clean. Sprinkle with a dash of flaky salt, if desired.
4. Let the brownies cool completely in the pan on a wire rack. Lift the parchment and brownies from the pan and cut them into 12 squares to serve, and enjoy your sweet Valentine's Day treat!

Nutrition Info
(serving: 1 brownie)
Calories per serving: 200
Total fat: 14 g
Saturated fat: 3 g
Sodium: 110 mg
Total Carbohydrate: 17 g
Dietary fiber: 3 g
Sugar: 9 g
Protein: 7 g

Recipe adapted from:
dishingouthealth.com

