

# LIFE IN HEARTS

ISSUE 06  
2024/2025



CANADIAN WOMEN WITH MEDICAL  
HEART ISSUES

LIVING BRAVELY. LOVING BOLDLY.

# LIFE IN HEARTS

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Canadian Women With Medical Heart Issues Facebook Support Community



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Photo Credit: Nancy Houston Bradley, BC  
Heart Attack. Left ventricular stemi 98% blockage, 2017

# J.R. NOTES



Here we are issue number 06 - the December/January issue!  
As I started preparing to get this issue together, I wondered if I should continue... the readership is good and slowly growing every issue ... It is a labour of love, I do enjoy working with the contributors and editors ... but I admit this issue was a bit of a grind as I was not sure I had enough content and was not sure when I would get it done with my commitments in November ... yet, here it is and it is a very good issue - so much great information by so many amazing HWQs (heart warrior queens). I cannot do this without your contributions/participation! A HUGE Thank You!

The next issue will be for HEART MONTH and will be a stand alone month... I would like to get on a better schedule for our Bi-monthly E-Magazine. If you would like to contribute to the Heart Month issue or future issues or if you have a topic you would like to see us cover, please reach out!



We are all from different backgrounds, celebrating various holidays over the next 2 months... each beautiful in its message and celebration. I hope you have a wonderful and joy filled season of love, laughter and good health.

Remember it is about the time we give each other rather than the noise so many holidays create. I will be using the Holiday Bucket List to create a calm and stress-free season.

Thank you everyone for being on this journey with me...

  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



# NEW YORK WOULD HAVE TO WAIT.

by KAREN NARRAWAY, Ontario  
Quadruple Coronary Artery Bypass Surgery  
and Heart Failure, 2017

*As I'm in the cath lab, having the angiogram done, the cardiologist leans down to my ear and says, "I'm sorry, this is not what we expected to find." My body froze with fear.*

**U**nbeknownst to me, my heart story started at the age of 11, when my dad had his first heart attack at age 48.

Fast forward to November 2015. I had just turned 52 and suddenly, there was a severe increase in my resting heart rate (HR). A visit to my Family Doctor (FD) resulted in me being started on a beta blocker, called Propranolol, and got me a referral to a Cardiologist.

This led to a Stress Echo test after which the Cardiologist told me, with great confidence, that my heart was "strong and healthy". When I asked about my elevated resting HR, it was ultimately ruled down to "anxiety", but she provided me with a prescription for Nitrospray, "just in case".

Now fast forward to July 6, 2017... the date of my 2nd Stress Echo, which was the result of two visits to the Emergency Room with

severe upper epigastric pain, and over a year's worth of tests and procedures to try to identify the cause of this pain. The diagnosis from every doctor was, "it's not your heart" but most likely "anxiety" and/or "acid reflux". As time went on, the pain became a daily occurrence and would get worse with activity. I decided to give the "just in case" Nitrospray a try, and sure enough, it helped to reduce the pain.

The day of my second Stress Echo, I worked in the morning and had booked the afternoon off for my stress test and also to do some last minute shopping for my trip to New York City the following week. I was so excited as I had never been to NYC and I was going with my best friend and our two daughters.

As I was doing my stress test, I started to experience the exercise induced chest pain, and I could see consistent ST changes on my ECG. Part of me filled with dread, but another part of me thought, "now someone might believe me!"

The Cardiologist wanted to know why I had waited so long to come see her with these symptoms... maybe because everyone, including her, kept telling me that it was

"not my heart"! She insisted that I needed to go to the hospital "right away" and that "no", I would "not be going to NYC". Before I knew it, I was in a room in the Coronary Care Unit (CCU), awaiting an angiogram the next day.

As I sat with my family in the hospital, the denial crept in and I kept saying this was the "most ridiculous thing I have ever heard!" How could I go from "your heart is strong and healthy", and "it's not your heart", to being in the CCU in just over a year.

I wasn't too concerned about having the angiogram the next morning, as my Cardiologist reassured me that I didn't fit the profile of someone with heart disease; I didn't smoke, didn't drink, I was fit and active...and I was female! Maybe I could still go to NYC after all!

As I'm in the cath lab, having the angiogram done, the cardiologist leans down to my ear and says, "I'm sorry, this is not what we expected to find." My body froze with fear. They had found 6 blockages all over 80% and the LAD was 95% blocked. I would need bypass surgery. I would not be going home. I would be having emergency surgery. I would not be going to NYC.

The next few days were a blur as I had so many tests and scans in preparation for the surgery, I had to prepare a Will, take care of things at work as I would be off for the next 3 months, but my main priority was making sure my kids were coping with this news.



Five days after the angiogram, I had Quadruple Coronary Artery Bypass Surgery. Unfortunately, the surgery was more complicated than anticipated as my vessels were "extremely tiny", I had lost a lot of blood and the surgeons were not able to bypass all of the blockages. 5 days after the surgery, I was discharged home.

The first 6 weeks were rough as I was experiencing nausea, brain fog, difficulty concentrating, sleep

*... my main priority was making sure my kids were coping with this news.*

deprivation and not to mention the little inconvenience of the sternal incision and the leg incision, which went from groin to ankle, and which now had an infection in it. All of this led to many trips to the FD to adjust meds and for check ups.

Six months later, I was finally able to return to work on a gradual basis and I was hopeful that returning to work would make me feel "healed". I continued working for the next 8 months, but during this time, I was experiencing a fair bit of Angina and daily exhaustion. I felt like a failure because I didn't bounce back from the surgery "better than ever", like everyone (including myself) had predicted.

Just after my one year "heartiversary" of the bypass surgery, I had a second angiogram, because of the persistent angina. Unfortunately, it revealed more blockages and I was no longer a candidate for further surgery due to my tiny vessels. In fact, I learned with this angiogram that my coronary arteries were so tiny that the

angio-catheter could not even pass through some of them. Therefore, I was also not a candidate for stents or angioplasty. This was tough news to digest. My Cardiologist sent my file to a team of Cardiologists and Surgeons at Toronto General Hospital for a "second opinion".

It was decided unanimously that the only other potential option in the future would be a heart transplant. In the meantime, I would be managed medically to control symptoms. More tough news.

My Cardiologist further suggested that I go on LTD to help control the angina and to ameliorate the exhaustion. This was an emotionally difficult thing for me to do. I had been a Registered Nurse for 33 years and it was a big part of my identity. As a result of all this tough news and so many changes, I slipped into a deep depression...I was not loving my "new normal". But thankfully, this was when I discovered THIS group online...and I started to realize that I was not alone with all these life-changing experiences and overwhelming



Marilyn Denis Show (February 2020)



Marilyn Denis Show (Feb 2020)

I am thankful for my two amazing kids, my family and friends who support me in ways they are not even aware of, my fur-grandchildren ... one dog and one cat, my great-nephews who light up my life, the incredible people and opportunities that my diagnoses and experience has led me to, and although our health system is faltering, I am so thankful that I live in Canada and had access to such amazing life-saving surgery.

Oh and by the way, I did make it to NYC at a later date with my best friend and our daughters. And what could be better than going in the heat of July? ...going the week before Christmas and experiencing the beautiful ambience with snow on the ground and lights and decorations in all the shops. We had a marvellous time!



feelings. I also had the opportunity to speak to a therapist and to get some relief from the darkness with antidepressants.

So, here I am, 7 years post-bypass surgery, 6 years post-diagnosis of "severe, premature coronary artery disease with no further options for revascularization" and my favourite word is "stable". I continue to struggle with Angina at times and my medications have been tweaked and added to and increased over the years, and my most recent ECG shows significant changes, but I am so grateful and thankful for every day.



New York - MADE IT! (December 2017)





Excerpt from the [Heart and Stroke](#) website under Surgeries and Procedures A to Z - Coronary Artery Bypass Surgery. Published with permission.

**PURPOSE:**

*A brief introduction to the heart condition or procedure being featured in the current issue of Life In Hearts E-Magazine.*

# CARDIAC BYPASS - CABG -

## What is coronary artery bypass surgery?

Coronary artery bypass surgery improves the blood flow to the heart muscle. It is commonly referred to as bypass surgery or Coronary Artery Bypass Graft (CABG, pronounced like cabbage) surgery.

## Why is it done?

Bypass surgery is performed to improve blood flow problems to the heart muscle caused by the buildup of plaque (atherosclerosis) in the coronary arteries. The surgery involves using a piece of blood vessel (artery, vein) taken from elsewhere in the body to create a detour or bypass around the blocked portion of the coronary artery.

One alternative to bypass surgery is Percutaneous Cardiac Intervention (also known as angioplasty), a non-surgical technique that uses catheters and small structures called stents to keep the arteries open. If there are many blockages or if the blockages are positioned in places that are difficult for a catheter to reach (for example, at a bend in a blood vessel), your doctor may recommend bypass surgery as your best alternative.

By improving blood flow, bypass surgery may decrease heart-related chest pain (angina), make you feel better and increase your ability to be active. Bypass surgery doesn't cure the underlying heart disease. Lifestyle changes and medications as prescribed by your healthcare providers are critical to reduce atherosclerosis and blood clot formation to prevent another blockage.

## What is done?

- A piece of a healthy blood vessel from the patient's leg, arm, or chest will be "harvested" to be used as the bypass.
- Unless you are undergoing one of the newer procedures (minimally invasive bypass or off-pump or beating-heart surgery), the heart is stopped so the surgeons can work on it.
- A machine called the heart-lung machine will take over the work of your heart and lungs while the surgeon is operating on the heart.

## What is done cont?

- The section of the healthy blood vessel is attached above and below the blocked artery.
- When the heart is restarted, blood flow is diverted through the bypass around the narrowed portion of the diseased artery.
- Depending upon the number of blockages, several bypasses may be created.

## What can you expect?

Usually, the surgery is scheduled ahead of time.

A week or so before your operation, you will probably be asked to visit your hospital's pre-admission unit.

- Blood and urine tests, an electrocardiogram, and an X-ray may be performed.

Your doctor will explain the risks and benefits of the procedure and you will be asked to sign a consent form. You may be asked whether you, or inform your doctor if you:

- have ever had a reaction to any contrast dye, iodine, or any serious allergic reaction (for example, from a bee sting or from eating shellfish)
- have asthma
- are allergic to any medication
- have any bleeding problems or are taking blood-thinning medication
- have a history of kidney problems or diabetes
- have body piercings on your chest or abdomen
- have had any recent change in your health
- are, or may be, pregnant.

Bypass surgery may be performed the same day or you may be admitted the night before.

- The hair on your chest may be clipped.
- You will be asked to bathe using special antibacterial soap sponges to disinfect your skin.
- To reduce the risk of vomiting, you will be asked not to eat or drink after midnight the night before surgery.

A bypass is done under a general anesthetic, so you will be asleep throughout the procedure and for some time afterwards.

If you smoke, you should stop at least two weeks before your surgery, as smoking can contribute to blood clotting and breathing problems. Smoking is a major risk factor for the development of atherosclerosis and should be stopped altogether.

You will be very sleepy when you arrive in the operating room. The anesthesiologist will insert intravenous tubes and give you additional medication to put you to sleep. After you are completely asleep, all the equipment needed to help support you during the surgery and in your early recovery are put in place.

Unless you are undergoing off-pump or minimally invasive surgery, the heart must be stopped so the surgeons can work on it. To ensure your body continues to receive a flow of oxygen-rich blood, you will be hooked up to a heart-lung machine. This machine takes over the pumping action of the heart and the work of the lungs.

The surgery can take anywhere from 3 to 6 hours, depending upon the number of bypasses that are created. When you wake up, you will be in the recovery room or an intensive care unit (ICU). You can expect to stay in the hospital 5 to 7 days. How quickly you recover from surgery will depend in large part upon how healthy you were before the surgery and how well you tolerated the operation. If you have minimally invasive surgery, your hospital stay may be shorter and your recovery faster. When you return home, contact your doctor if you experience increased pain, redness, swelling, bleeding or discharge from an incision, fever or chills, breathing problems, swelling in the leg and abnormal heartbeats or for any other unusual physical problems.

For further information: [www.Heart&Stroke.ca](http://www.Heart&Stroke.ca)



# HEART RETAIL & THERAPY PRODUCTS



There are so many great products available to help us live better and products that make us feel good or support a cause that is close to our hearts... here are a few:

1



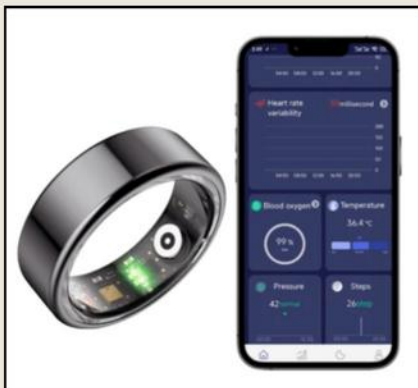
## Life In Hearts Calendar 2025

[LifelInHearts.ca](http://LifelInHearts.ca)

This is the 4th year for our fundraising calendar. Join Hope as she travels across Canada visiting beautiful locations and experiencing all that is Canadian.

All proceeds go to various Canadian Women with Medical Heart Issues initiative.

2



## Vital Smart Health Ring

[VitalHealthRing.com](http://VitalHealthRing.com)

The Vital Health Ring delivers accurate readings, improves sleep quality, and offers a discreet design that's comfortable for all-day wear. It has quick charging, long battery life of up to 7 days, and in-app data analysis, making it a versatile and affordable health monitoring tool. Its water-resistant build and compatibility with other devices make it easy to integrate into any lifestyle.

With a comfortable, sleek design and no subscription fees, the Vital Health Ring offers excellent value.

3

## Bright Heart 500 Piece Jigsaw Puzzle for Adults

[Amazon.ca](http://Amazon.ca)

Artist, designer and social media influencer, Jessi Raulet, has become well known for her hand-painted, bright and bold designs. With an ability to craft vibrantly optimistic colour palettes, Jessi's work is packed with good vibes. The American born, Paris-based artist has an engaged and rapidly growing social media following of 120K fans garnering the attention of various media outlets including features on Good Morning America, Dancing with the Stars and PopSugar.





## Tips & Strategies

# TRAVELING SOON? READ THIS FIRST...



By RISA MALLORY, Ontario  
Spontaneous Coronary Artery  
Dissection (SCAD), 2018

*“Travel is more than the seeing of sights;  
it is a change that goes on, deep and  
permanent, in the ideas of the living.”  
- Miriam Beard*

**I**n November of 2018, while spending the winter in Arizona, I survived a triple Spontaneous Coronary Artery Dissection (SCAD) which was complicated by a 90 minute heart attack, cardiac arrest and cardiogenic shock before blood flow was restored with three stents. My first trip by plane after this life threatening event was out of necessity, I was finally flying home. I was weak, I was scared and I was traumatized, but the promise of home, family and the safety net of the Canadian health system motivated me to climb into a metal tube, strap myself in and fly 35,000 feet above perfectly safe Earth for hours with thin

air, cramped space and 200 germ-infested people. I chose not to travel again until 366 days after my hospital discharge as I was unable to purchase a travel health insurance policy that would cover the costs of any heart related health claim. In the year of waiting, my psyche began to heal, my stamina increased and my wanderlust returned!

In 2020, we returned to Arizona to sell the property we had owned for 12 years and in a very ‘carpe diem’ (seize the day) way, decided to travel the world instead, heading to a new and exotic destination each winter.



Over the next five years, despite knowingly taking myself where sophisticated health care was lacking and medical access was a challenge, my sense of adventure and determination to travel increased. In fact, I have travelled farther and father from the safety of home and family each winter! When I let that sink in, I question my sanity. I am not a risk taker, but there is a loud voice that urges me to not let my SCAD define me, paralyze me and shrink my ability to embrace life to the fullest. This is me and my perspective and with huge respect to you all, this may not be you. Honour your body, your circumstances and your inner voice, she will always speak your truth.

*"The impulse to travel is one of the hopeful symptoms of life."  
- Agnes Repplier*



So lets say you've decided to spread your wings and fly! Here are some things to consider during the planning, preparation and fulfillment of your very unique and exciting carpe diem adventure!!

## 1. Planning Your Trip

### Medical Clearance:



- Check with your healthcare provider before planning any trip, especially if it involves air travel or strenuous activities.

### Emergency Plan:



- Discuss an action plan with your health care team and your travel companions in case symptoms worsen or you need emergency care while away.

### Pack Essentials:



- Create packing lists that include essentials for heart health, such as medications, a blood pressure monitor, emergency contact cards, and health insurance details.

### Travel-sized Medical Equipment:



- Consider equipment such as portable blood pressure monitors, pill organizers, and heart rate monitors.

### Travel Health Insurance:

- Choose the policy that best suits your financial, medical and travel needs and gives you peace of mind. Be prepared for your medical interview with your current prescription information, dates of clinical visits, diagnostic tests, surgeries and hospitalizations. Be totally honest and transparent during your medical interview as any non-disclosure, even unintentional, can result in the denial of a legitimate claim.



### Travel Destinations:



- Extreme heat, cold, or high altitudes can strain the cardiovascular system. Choose climates where you'll feel comfortable and be able to rest.

### Medications:

- Ensure you have enough medication to last the trip, plus extra in case of delays. Keep a list of your medications and their dosages, and consider a doctor's note if traveling internationally.



### Activity Levels:



- Choose destinations with exploring and excursion activities that won't require too much exertion or stress on the heart.

### Healthcare Access:

- Make sure you'll be near quality healthcare facilities. Research the location of hospitals and emergency response services.



### Distance from home:

- Choose locales that you are comfortable with when considering duration of flights or distance from family and health care teams.



## 2. Preparing for Air Travel

### Airport Assistance:

- In advance of your flight, you can request wheelchair assistance for transfers in the airport. At the departure gate, ask for priority boarding if you feel you need extra time to settle into your seat.

### Blood Clot Risks:

- Long flights can increase the risk of blood clots. Compression stockings can help, as can moving around the cabin every hour.

### Hydration:

- The dry air on planes can be dehydrating, so drink plenty of water and avoid alcohol or caffeine.

### Cabin Pressure:

- Heart patients should avoid flights to high-altitude destinations if they're not acclimatized. Pressurized cabins are generally safe, but some may still feel short of breath or light-headed.

## 3. While On Vacation

### Healthy Choices:

Try to stick to a heart-healthy diet while traveling. Avoid too much salt, fatty foods, or alcohol, which can raise blood pressure and strain the heart.



### Avoid Heavy Lifting:

Carrying heavy bags can strain your heart. Use luggage with wheels, and consider help from porters or companions.



### Stress Management:

Stress can affect heart health, so try relaxation techniques like deep breathing or meditation to stay calm during delays, cancellations, or other disruptions.



### Wear a Medical ID:

A bracelet or card indicating your heart condition and any medication allergies can be invaluable in an emergency.



### Plan for Rest:

Build downtime into your itinerary to avoid exhaustion, especially after strenuous travel days.



### Emergency Contacts:

Have a list of emergency contacts and your healthcare provider's number readily accessible.



### Know the Signs and Symptoms:

Women may experience subtle or less recognized heart attack symptoms, like unusual fatigue, nausea, sweating or discomfort in the neck, jaw, or back. Seek help immediately if you feel unwell.



# Beat heart disease. Beat stroke. Beat as one.

If you're one of the 3.5 million people in Canada living with heart disease, stroke or vascular cognitive impairment, resources are just a click away.

Visit [heartandstroke.ca](https://heartandstroke.ca) for more about managing your condition, healthy recipes, tips to reduce your risks, and resources to support your recovery. You'll also learn more about our work, donor-funded research and our priority focus on women's heart and brain health.



[Learn more](#)

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## ABOUT US

The HeartLife Foundation is a patient-driven charity whose mission is to transform the quality of life for people living with heart failure by engaging, educating, and empowering a global community to create lasting solutions and build healthier lives.



**ENGAGE • EDUCATE • EMPOWER**



HeartLife  
FOUNDATION

- **FB Community**
- **Academy**
- **Advocacy**

Learn more:







# Vaccines as Adults...



By VAL STEEVES - Manitoba  
Cardiac Microvascular  
Dysfunction and Coronary  
Vasospasm, 2019

Did you know....

**Health Canada recommends adults have immunization booster shots?**

**W**hen we think about immunization, we typically think about children and the routine immunization schedule. However, adults require another dose of some shots (called a booster) as well.

As we get older, the protection we had from previous vaccinations can decrease for some diseases. Getting a booster shot can increase our immunity to provide the best protection. As well, some adults may have missed one or more of their vaccines so they may need to catch up and get these vaccines now.



By keeping up-to-date with vaccines, adults cannot only minimize contracting these diseases but also prevent the spread of disease to those who may be more likely to get sick from them. These individuals include: babies, young children, people who are pregnant, and people with certain medical conditions, such as those with weakened immunity. This is known as community or herd immunity.

## What boosters are recommended?

Ask your health care provider if your immunizations are up-to-date or what you need to be fully protected. Typical adult immunization schedules according to Health Canada include:



Tetanus vaccine every 10 years;



Tetanus, Diptheria, Pertussis (Tdap) for adults who have NOT previously received a pertussis-containing vaccine in adulthood or pregnant women in every pregnancy optimally between 27-32 weeks gestation;



Pneumoccal Conjugate (Pevnar 20) by age 65 years or at least 5 years from your last pneumococcal vaccine;



Influenza vaccine annually;



COVID vaccine annually.

## What optional vaccines should I consider?

There are other vaccines that your health care provider may recommend for you depending on the following:

- What vaccines you have had in the past;
- If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant;
- If you have health conditions;
- Your type of work; and,
- If you have upcoming travel.



An example of an optional vaccine is Shingrex, which is for the prevention of shingles (herpes zoster). There may be a cost for the vaccine unless you reside in one of the four provinces which provide public funding for it.

Regarding boosters and other vaccines, having collaborative discussions with your health care provider will determine what is best for you.

For further information, please refer to **Vaccination for adults - Canada.ca**. or your provincial immunization schedule for adults.





# HOLIDAYS & OUR HEART HEALTH.

By Sarah Galzerano - JeffersonHealth.Org (USA)  
Original article published Nov 2023 - 'Here's How to Protect Your Heart Health During the Holidays'



**W**hile the holidays themselves can't cause a heart attack, certain things people do during the hectic, festive season may stress their heart health more than they realize.

Heart attacks and other cardiac events, such as heart failure flare-ups and “holiday heart syndrome” – a term used to describe palpitations induced by alcohol consumption – often surge during the winter holidays. In fact, cardiac-related deaths are nearly 5% higher between Christmas and New Year's Day.

This is likely related to the holiday season demanding a lot of time and effort in addition to our normal routines. Many people are fatigued before the party even begins, says emergency medicine specialist Dr. Henry R. Schuitema. “So much needs to get done, it's easy to lose sight of self-care and turn to unhealthy behaviours that can make us vulnerable,” says Dr. Schuitema.

Common triggers of cardiac complications, Dr. Schuitema notes, include stress, overexertion, alcohol, indulging in rich, salty foods, and delaying crucial medical care.

So, how can you lower your risk for heart attacks, heart disease and other complications? Dr. Schuitema and cardiologist Dr. Daniel Tarditi explain the risk factors, how to keep the holidays as “heart-friendly” as possible and avoid unnecessary trips to the emergency room.

## Stress and Your Heart

When manageable, stress is a healthy, normal part of life. But, sometimes, prolonged stress or sudden, drastic spikes in stress can cause palpitations, trigger heart attacks or increase your risk for heart disease.

This is because stress causes an increase in cortisol – the primary stress hormone – leading to increases in blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar and heart rate. Plus, these stressors can increase the risk of heart attack, stroke, or retention of extra fluid and heart failure, explains Dr. Tarditi.



“This time of year, your usual stressors may be compounded with financial and social expectations, grief and even geo-political concerns,” adds Dr. Schuitema. “It’s important to find some downtime to cope with stress, put your health first and remember, you can’t say ‘yes’ to everything.”

## Strain from Winter Storms

If the holidays are accompanied by snowfall and bitter weather, too much time outdoors and baring down to shovel snow can also be detrimental. Cold temperatures alone impact the body by causing the coronary arteries to constrict, blood pressure to rise and the heart to work harder. When this is combined with poor hydration and something as physically strenuous as shoveling heavy snow, it may lead to a sudden cardiac event.

Shoveling snow is particularly risky for people at high risk for heart disease – if they are overweight or obese; smoke or have a smoking history; have type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol or high blood pressure; or a history of heart attack.

## Diet and Congestive Heart Failure

The average American adult’s diet is unfortunately rich in salt, which doesn’t bode well for people with existing heart disease, adds Dr. Schuitema. You should be mindful of excess sodium when you have a compromised heart, since high salt intake can trigger heart failure.

If you or an older family member have congestive heart failure, remember to manage it well by taking all your medications as prescribed; double-checking with your provider on any restrictions if you plan to consume alcohol; and keeping a close eye on weight gain, explains Dr. Tarditi.



During the holidays, pay attention to these warning signs for fluid buildup with congestive heart failure:

- Shortness of breath, which worsens when you lay down and improves when sitting upright
- Swelling in the legs, arms, feet or ankles
- Weight gain

“Gaining more than two pounds a day or five pounds a week may indicate fluid retention or overload and should be addressed with your cardiologist as soon as possible,” says Dr. Tarditi.

### Alcohol and ‘Holiday Heart Syndrome’

Holiday heart syndrome refers to episodes of supraventricular tachycardia: a sudden arrhythmia or irregularity in which the heart beats much faster than normal, explains Dr. Schuitema. Holiday heart syndrome may be caused by stress, dehydration, higher than usual alcohol intake, or a combination of these things.

“Alcohol acts as a natural irritant to the heart muscle,” says Dr. Tarditi. Studies show that just one

drink a day, over a 14-year period, can increase the risk for atrial fibrillation (AFib) by nearly 16% . Heavier drinking may increase the risk for scarring, electrical abnormalities, heart attack and stroke.

“Holiday heart syndrome can affect anyone, even those who are otherwise healthy,” warns Dr. Schuitema. Symptoms of holiday heart syndrome include pounding in your chest, shortness of breath or chest discomfort – all of which should be addressed in the emergency room to rule out something more serious, like a heart attack. Often, holiday heart syndrome will go away on its own, but some people will require medical treatment.



### Don’t Ignore Symptoms

“While it may be difficult to address symptoms during the holidays, not listening to our bodies can keep us from preventing potentially fatal episodes”, says Dr. Schuitema. “Whether you’re traveling from out of state, preparing a lot of food, not wanting to miss meaningful family time or simply being afraid to mention that something feels wrong,” says Dr. Schuitema. “That’s what we’re here for, even if what you suspect is dangerous turns out to be a clean bill of health. Catching something in its tracks is always better than delaying care.” “Some tell-tale warning signs of heart attacks and other cardiac events include chest discomfort that worsens with physical activity; a sudden rapid heart rate accompanied with jaw pain, shoulder pain, or shortness of breath; fatigue and weakness; and swelling of the legs, ankles and feet” shares Dr. Tarditi.



## **'HEART-FRIENDLY' TIPS TO REDEFINE YOUR HOLIDAYS**

The holidays don't have to be about overindulging until you feel sick (or actually become sick). Instead, you can enjoy well-spent time with your family, while ensuring you can be around for them for many years to come. Drs. Tarditi and Schuitema recommend the following:

**1**

### **STAY ON TRACK WITH MEDICATIONS.**

Try not to skip/miss doses. Whether you're traveling or simply busy at home, you can set reminders to help. And, if you are traveling and forget your medications, many pharmacies will provide a short emergency supply if they can confirm your prescription (call local pharmacies to confirm).

**2**

### **REMEMBER, EVERYTHING IS OKAY IN MODERATION.**

You should savour treats – foods and drinks that you aren't used to eating on a daily basis. However, you shouldn't overdo it. Even the seemingly "healthiest" people can suffer.

**3**

### **TAKE A BREAK.**

This time of year, there's one holiday and activity after another. You have to come down from the stress. Take some time for yourself and pay attention to your health. Fall back into your routine habits, as much as possible, during the "in-between."

**4**

### **LET YOUR FAMILY KNOW ABOUT HEALTH CONCERNS.**

If you had a severe food allergy or intolerance, you'd let your family know about it before a meal, right? If you can't have high-sodium dishes, perhaps they can adjust recipes to make them safer for you. You can also bring your own dishes.

**5**

### **WHEN IT SNOWS, DON'T PUSH YOUR BODY – AND YOUR HEART – PAST ITS LIMITS.**

If you don't have to leave the house, you can let the snow melt or only clear a small path. If you have to shovel, it's safer to push the snow and safest to find someone to help.

**6**

### **LISTEN TO YOUR BODY AND ADDRESS SYMPTOMS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.**

Everyone has different limits based on their condition. Your body will let you know when it's not functioning well. Reaching out to your provider over the phone or via Telehealth can help prevent a trip to the ER during the holiday season. And, if necessary remember that the emergency department staff is ready 24 hours a day, every day to help care for you and address your concerns.





# REFLECTIONS



By RENEE CAMPBELL - Ontario  
Heart Disease along with  
Bicuspid Aortic Valve Stenosis, 2019

I'm only 42, there's no way it's my heart  
I don't smoke, don't drink, hell I don't even fart

The doctor told me, it was all in my head  
No this is real, I can't get out of bed

He said to me, it wasn't a heart attack  
So I lived with pains, in my chest and back

I begged and pleaded, for someone to hear  
I'm trying to tell them, the end is near

On the treadmill, began the pains right away  
My arms went numb, my heart was going to pay

They stopped the machine, got me on a table  
I couldn't breathe, my story was not a fable

The doctor said, the test did not show  
He needed to do more, so they would know

Forget the rest, book the angiogram today  
20% chance they'd find anything anyway

Got up that morning, on Valentine's Day  
Angiogram first, then I was left to pray

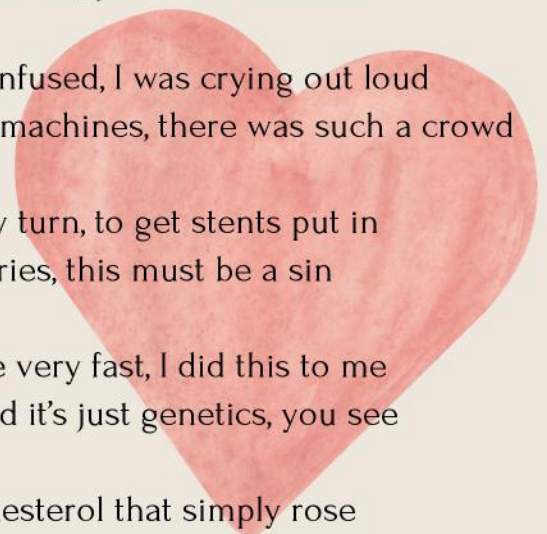
The doctor came, paper in hand and said  
You're 95% blocked, you should be dead

Scared and confused, I was crying out loud  
Hooked up to machines, there was such a crowd

Waiting for my turn, to get stents put in  
3 blocked arteries, this must be a sin

The guilt came very fast, I did this to me  
The doctor said it's just genetics, you see

It was my cholesterol that simply rose  
It did its damage, that's just how it goes





I have to learn how to deal with this new life  
Cause I'm needed every day as a mom and a wife

My new list of medications, one pill at a time  
Set my alarm reminder, wait for the chime

Oh yeah and the blood thinners, oh my gawd  
My menstrual cycle was definitely odd

No one told me about the blood clots I'd pass  
Or the pains I'd suffer, how it'd feel like glass

They never told me just walking would be hard  
I need to carry my nitro and be on guard

Cardiac rehab was my safe place to land  
Debbie, Miriam, Faith and Lina all played a hand

I worked so hard every day to get well  
But unfortunately the day came, I fell

Back to the ER to fight these doctors again  
Why won't they listen, what's wrong with these men

Women are misdiagnosed, just tossed to the side  
I hated having to beg, plead, I even cried

I'm being dismissed, why don't they hear  
My pains are real, I'm being crystal clear

My history is there, why won't you believe  
Please hurry so my daughter doesn't have to grieve

Add another pill, more tests on my plate  
Now I wait, quietly, for my unwanted fate







# Navigating the Holidays with Heart Disease



By CHERYL STRACHAN, RD - Alberta  
Author of 'The 30 Minute Heart  
Healthy Cookbook'  
[SweetSpotNutrition.ca](http://SweetSpotNutrition.ca)



## Seven tips for keeping the joy in the season.

**L**ess energy but more commitments, piles of treats you feel you can't have, relatives & friends offering unsolicited advice... A heart diagnosis can make the holidays harder, but if you can be assertive, proactive, and self-compassionate, you can enjoy the season and stay on track with heart health.

Ok, let's go over the tips for keeping the joy in the season. It's easier than you may think!

# HOLIDAY SUCCESS PLANNING



## 1. Practice saying "NO"...

Congratulations, you now have a bulletproof excuse to say no to whatever doesn't bring you happiness. "Can we skip the gift exchange? Since my heart attack I've been trying to take it easy."

Leave yourself time and energy to breathe, relax, and enjoy whatever lifts you up in the holiday season.

## 2. Instead of "I shouldn't eat that" think "What can I eat that will make me feel my best?" "

You know yourself: Is it a hearty breakfast? A nourishing snack to hold you over until the party? A helping of salad with roasted chicken before you savour a few cookies? Think about which foods are nourishing for you, rather than what to avoid.

## 3. Be ready for food shamers.

Commenting on other people's food choices is never okay, but after a heart event, people want to "help."

"Can you still eat that?" "Don't you have to be more careful about your diet now?"

You should never have to justify what you eat, but it might help to have a response prepared: "When I try to be too restrictive with my eating I crave sweets more than ever," or "The tree is lovely isn't it?"



## 4. If you prefer to eat something lighter, bring it!

Holiday get-togethers can be heavy on crispy appetizers and liquor, short on fruit and veggies. But hosts are usually happy to have you bring a salad or bowl of fresh berries.

Consider a colourful bean or lentil salad. Fibre is usually in short supply during the holidays! Diced red bell pepper, snap peas, carrots, oranges, or pomegranate seeds add vibrant, appetizing colours.

## 5. Don't fall into the "all or nothing" trap.

Tune up your eating habits if you like, but the quest for perfection isn't necessary, and it can backfire.

No guideline says we must have ZERO salt, ZERO sugar, or ZERO saturated fat. It's nearly impossible to hold yourself to that kind of extreme standard.

Instead, think in terms of the 80/20 principle. If around 80% of what you eat supports your health, you're doing brilliantly.

The other 20% isn't "bad," it's just food you chose for other perfectly good reasons. Maybe it was the only thing at the gathering and you were hungry. Maybe it reminds you of your grandmother. Maybe you simply enjoy it! All fine reasons to eat.

## 6. Be a picky eater.

Enjoy your favourites if you like, but let's be honest: Some "treats" that pop up in December aren't all that special.

The chain-store donuts a well-meaning vendor brought to the office... are they really that good? The mass-produced chocolates we see every year? Aunt Mabel's fruit cake?

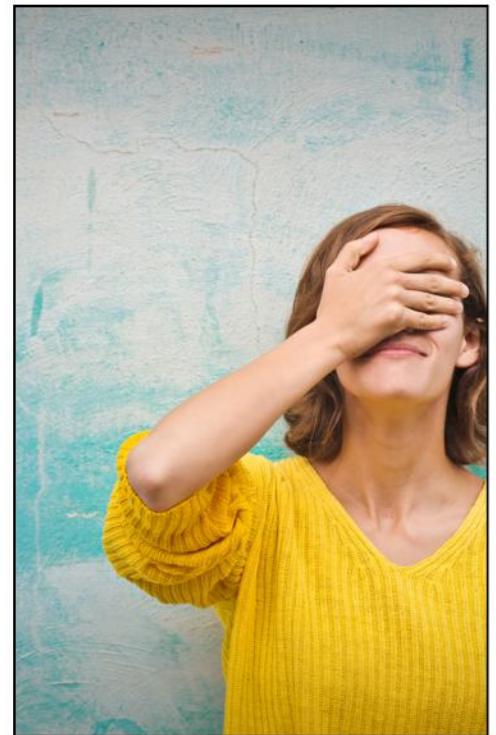
Always your choice, but don't eat it just because it's there.

## 7. Skip the guilt.

Many people fall into a cycle of eating what feels like too much, followed by guilt, then food restriction, until they feel so deprived that they snap and eat to what seems like excess again.

Cutting out the guilt can help break this so-called "eat-repent-repeat" cycle and make your holiday season more enjoyable.

If you do eat (or drink) in a way you regret the next day, no worries! Regular habits impact our health, but one indulgent day on a background of heart-healthy eating, not so much.



## You survived. Celebrate!

Hopefully your heart scare leads you to a greater appreciation of what really matters to you at the holidays: Maybe it's reconnecting with loved ones or a quiet wintery walk alone. Maybe it's baking and enjoying cookies.

Whatever it is for you, enjoy! Wishing you well during the holidays and beyond.

## Ready to Recommit to Heart Healthy Eating? Start Here.

At some point in December, you might find yourself saying something like “Ugh, my old habits are creeping back.” Not a problem. It’s natural to need to recommit every so often. What to do first? Get clear on exactly what you’re trying to accomplish and why. Only then you can move on to “how”.

### To find your way, focus on your why.

When I ask new clients what we’re trying to achieve, often the answer is generic: “I need to get healthy.” “I shouldn’t eat so much.”

How about you? What motivates you toward healthier eating?

Whatever your initial response, I invite you to peel back a few layers of that onion. Try to dig deeper: What does being healthy actually look like to you? How would life be different if you got there? Why does it matter?

“I want to be here to help my kids grow up.”

“I want to have enough energy to go to the park with my granddaughter.”

Goals like that work better than “I should eat better” or something similarly vague.

### Planning for lasting change.

Psychologist and behaviour change researcher Dr. Dayna Lee-Baggley says that while people are often keen to change right after a new health diagnosis, lasting motivation comes from personal, meaningful goals that relate to our values and identity.

What kind of person do you want to be? How do you want to show up in the world?

The fear of another heart event might get you going, but being able to enjoy hiking with your partner again can keep you going, if that’s important to you.

Similarly, avoiding cholesterol medication might prompt you to book a dietitian appointment, but learning to cook great food that your family loves can help you stay passionate about heart-healthy eating for life.

Think about what you want, rather than what you’re avoiding.

Once you have a clear picture of the end result and why it matters, you can shift your focus to how you’ll get there.

## Set better goals.

Dr. Lee-Bagley suggests people focus on a behaviour instead of an outcome goal. I like to think of this as your plan, versus calling it a goal.

So instead of...

- I want to avoid another heart attack → I'm going to walk for 10 minutes every morning, building up to 30 minutes.
- I should stop snacking at night → I'm going to brush my teeth and change into pyjamas at 9:00pm.
- I need to eat better → I'm going to try a new heart-healthy recipe each Sunday in January, to build up my repertoire.

These examples are all more about adding habits to your life rather than subtracting.

Dr. Lee-Bagley suggests picking something you're 90% confident that you can do. Feasible, sustainable goals work better than big hairy goals, for lasting change.

## Ask for help.

Once you get to “how,” consider reaching out for support and accountability! Your family doctor might be a good place to start. They can connect you with courses or counselling within your health system.

Check your benefits – you might have coverage to see a private therapist or dietitian.

If you need more help eating with heart health in mind, you can download my ebook for free: [The Sweet Spot Guide to Eating Well With Heart Concerns](https://sweetspotnutrition.ca/cardiac) (sweetspotnutrition.ca/cardiac)

## You've got this.

What's your priority? Lower heart disease risk? More energy? Better mood? Weight loss? Strength?

(Note – lasting weight loss is a tough nut to crack. What are you hoping weight loss will do for you? Many of the underlying goals are achievable, even if you don't lose weight.)

Whatever it is, unpack it, so you have a crystal clear picture of exactly what and why it's important to you. Then the “how” will come more easily.

**Let's Do This!**





# BALANCING WELLNESS AND EMOTIONS DURING THE HOLIDAYS



By ANNIE SMITH, PTS, FIS, RAB II,  
 Ontario - Cardiac Sarcoidosis, 2015  
 All the Right Moves Personal  
 Training & Fitness



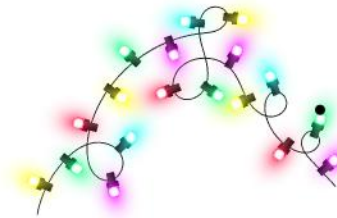
## *Hello and Happy Holidays!*

The holiday season is fast approaching and with that brings an assortment of emotions. Love, happiness, sadness, anxiety, overwhelmingness, gratitude and pure excitement to name a few. How do the holidays make you feel? Sit for a moment and have a mindful check ..... It's important to honour whatever feelings you have, take the time to feel them and know what tools can help you so that you can have the very best holiday season. Last month I shared mindfulness audios – have a scroll back and use them at this time of year of extreme planning.

Speaking of planning - A lot of time and effort goes into preparing for the holidays. There's so much to do that exercise usually takes the back burner. But don't fret, non-traditional workouts, like decorating, still count as physical activity! Anything that has you moving your body! Movement will help regulate your nervous system creating balance within. Movement is Key! Motion is Lotion!

## HOLIDAY CHORES = INCREASE MOVEMENT

So, this holiday season challenge yourself to maintain and not gain by eating smart, moving more, and being mindful of your choices. But how do you move more with such a loaded To-Do list?



- Retrieving all the boxes out of storage is a workout alone.
- For those who enjoy having a real tree, visit a tree farm where you can choose and cut your own Christmas Tree.
- Walk out the strands of Christmas lights to get them untangled and increase your steps.
- Decorate your home by going up and down a hallway, and / or up and down the stairs.
- Squat down and up to get them out of a box and decorate your home.



These are all functional moves that are already a huge part of your everyday life (eg., up and down a step stool in the kitchen; vacuuming; dusting, etc).

You've just created FUN movements on your own by decorating all over!  
Way to go YOU! Big Smile!

## FOOD + GAMES = FUN!

Also, with the holidays comes many opportunities for family/friend gatherings with the majority of these based around Holiday Feasts. But these gatherings don't have to be centered solely around food! By creating mindfulness and intention while eating, you can create a Holiday Dinner-Game night which promises FUN 'competition' with everyone!



There are many games that will allow everyone to get out of their seat and moving and chances are you'll play these games for a few hours. FUN physical activity – fantastic!

Check out the following list and try to include one at your next gathering – I ensure it will bring laughter and FUN along with some awesome, sneaky, physical activity!



## Charades/Pictionary

Make your own or purchase at local game store

## Twister

Get the kiddos to lead!



## Musical Dinner Chairs

Put on your favourite Holiday Tunes, have 1 less chair at the dinner table to start and begin. I'm sure you'll be giggling and starving after 1 round!

## Jingle Bell Family Squat Song

Everyone stands in front of their dinner chair and sings Jingle Bells. Squat up and down, tapping your butt on the edge of your chair, just in time to stand up again. Sing the song 3x through. The kids will giggle and love it as you're essentially playing with them and having FUN. Choose a different song and do this every night for a week before Christmas! Just you and your partner? That's okay too! Have FUN! Life's too short not to.



## Ornament 'n Spoon Race

Create 2 teams. First player of each team places an ornament on a spoon and walks to a designated location and back without dropping the ornament. Next player goes until all players had a turn. You must go back to the start if you drop the ornament. First team to have all players back wins.

## Christmas Scavenger Hunt

Make your own and have FUN with it!





# 12 Days of 'Fit-Mas'

On the first day of Fit-Mas, my trainer gave to me: some workout tips to become a healthier me. You sang that when you read it didn't you?! Awesome!

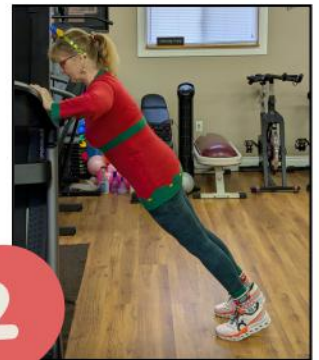


Just like the song! Perform this routine in a ladder: 20 seconds of high knee marches. Then 2 push ups and 20 seconds of high knee marches. Then 3 bicep curls, 2 push ups and 20 seconds of high knee marches, and so on...



1

20 seconds of High Knee Marches.



2

Wall/counter/floor Push Ups  
(Floor - on knees or feet).



3

Bicep Curls with soup cans/water bottles  
(or 5-10 lb weights in each hand).



4

Side arm lifts (from hip height to  
shoulder height), with soup cans/water  
bottles (or 2-5 lbs in each hand).



5

Balance on one leg (10 seconds each leg).  
If challenging, then have the toes down  
on the leg lifted to help maintain balance.



**ANNIE'S  
YOUTUBE  
BODY  
WEIGHT  
HOLIDAY  
WORKOUT**



6

**20-45 Second Wall Sit** – Standing with your back against a wall, walk our feet away from the wall and slide your back down the wall, keeping your knees in line with your ankles (don't let your knees go over your toes – if so, walk your feet further away from the wall). Pull your abs towards your spine and press your back into the wall and relax your shoulders. Breathe!

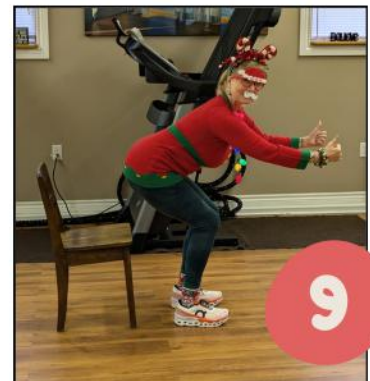
7



**Toe Taps Behind (7x each leg)** – Standing, tap your right foot behind you and back and repeat other leg while pulling with your arms.

8

**Side-to-side step touches.**



9

**Squat up and down off a chair.**

10



**20 Second Arm Circles** – Stand with arms at your sides and with controlled movement start to make medium-sized circles.

11

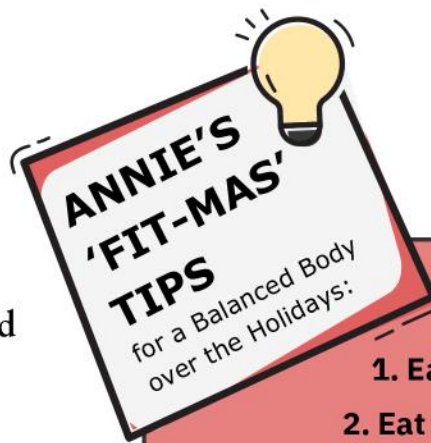


**Calf Raises** – Stand with feet shoulder-width apart and lift your heels up and down going up on your toes.

**12**

**Back Rows with soup cans/water bottles (or 3-10 lbs in each hand). Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent in 1/2 squat, weight in each hand, bend forward from hips slightly, weights in hands slightly in front of your body and pull them back towards your hips to either side of your body and then push them back to start.**

**Squeeze shoulder blades together (think of squeezing a grape between your shoulder blades).**



- 1. Eat mindfully ...**
- 2. Eat slowly ...**
- 3. Be mindful of your thoughts ...**
- 4. Don't skip meals ...**
- 5. Journal ...**
- 6. Drink a glass of water ...**
- 7. Lay out workout clothes the night before ...**
- 8. Keep the electronics outside your bedroom ...**
- 9. Go for a walk ...**
- 10. Sleep 7-9 hours night**
- 11. Meditate ...**
- 12. Keep Moving ...**
- 13. Smile ... as often as you can.**
- 14. Read a few pages in a book everyday ...**
- 15. Add more to this list ...**

I encourage you to do the '12 Days of Fit-Mas' 3-4x/week. You can also make your own Fit-mas workout, crank up the music, and get the whole family involved! The goal is to have intentional FUN while taking care of yourself!

I wish you a very Happy, Active & Fulfilled Holiday Season! Don't wait until January to get Fit and Healthy! Start Now!

*Congratulations on showing up for you & choosing to start creating a healthy lifestyle of physical fitness and mindfulness. I am so proud of you! See you next time! Namaste.*



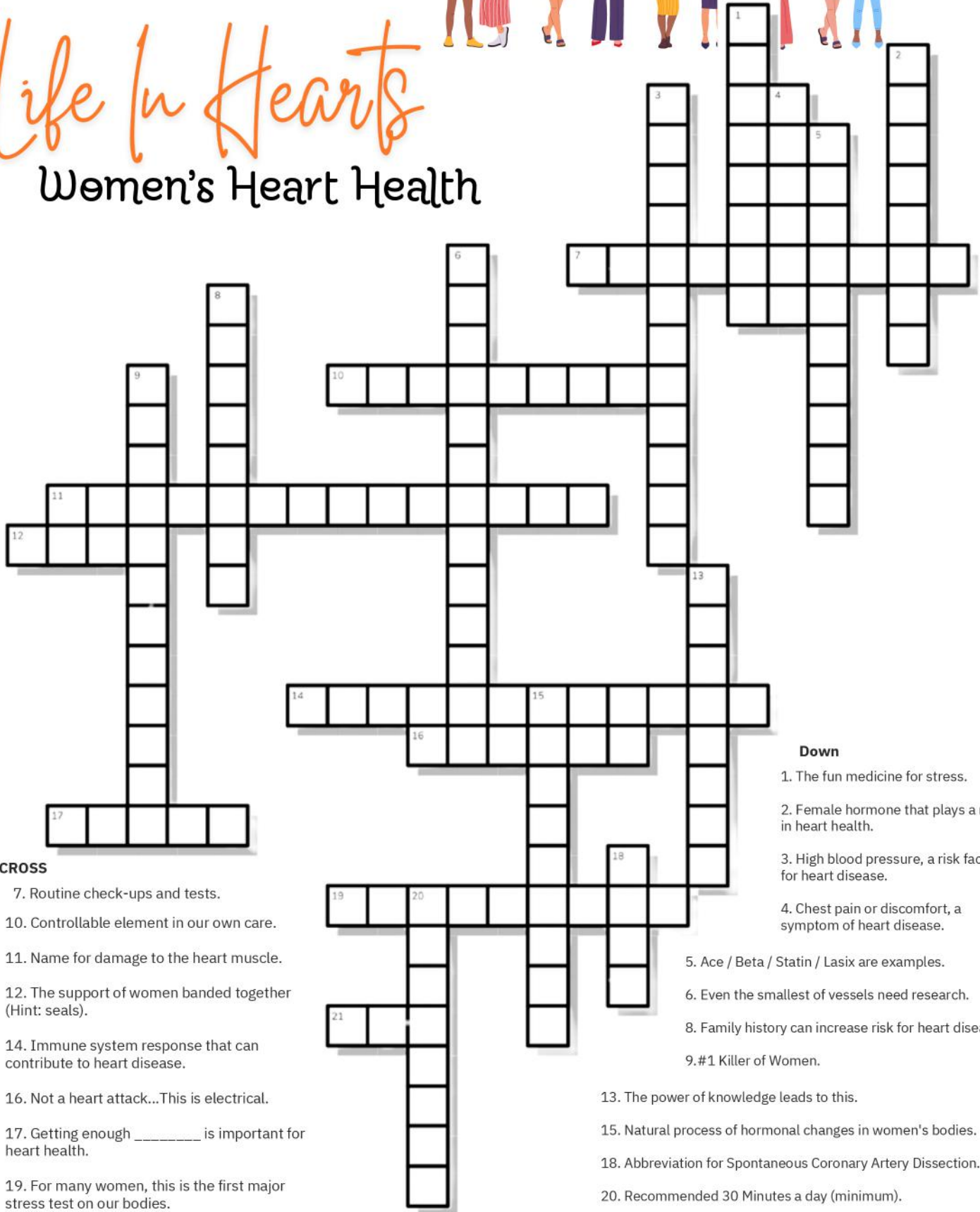
Annie is a regular contributor to the Ted Rogers Patient information website. Her "HEARTFIT" videos can be found at [OurHeartHub.ca](http://OurHeartHub.ca)





# Life In Hearts

## Women's Heart Health



**ACROSS**

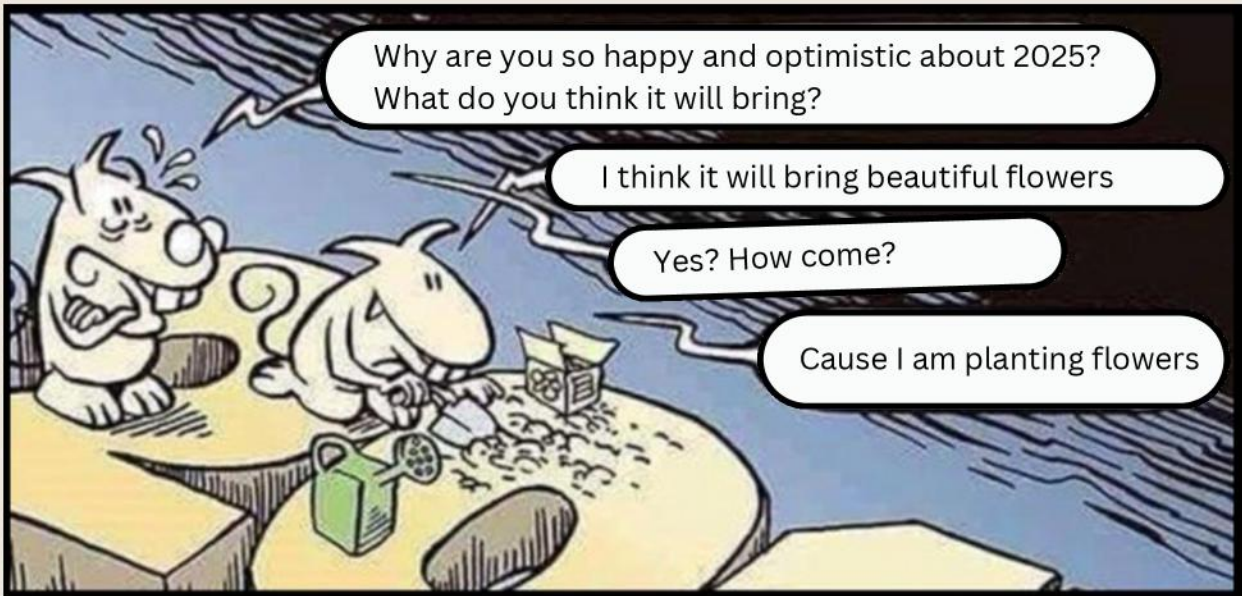
- 7. Routine check-ups and tests.
- 10. Controllable element in our own care.
- 11. Name for damage to the heart muscle.
- 12. The support of women banded together (Hint: seals).
- 14. Immune system response that can contribute to heart disease.
- 16. Not a heart attack...This is electrical.
- 17. Getting enough \_\_\_\_\_ is important for heart health.
- 19. For many women, this is the first major stress test on our bodies.
- 21. Push hard - sing Stay'n Alive.

**Down**

- 1. The fun medicine for stress.
- 2. Female hormone that plays a role in heart health.
- 3. High blood pressure, a risk factor for heart disease.
- 4. Chest pain or discomfort, a symptom of heart disease.
- 5. Ace / Beta / Statin / Lasix are examples.
- 6. Even the smallest of vessels need research.
- 8. Family history can increase risk for heart disease.
- 9. #1 Killer of Women.
- 13. The power of knowledge leads to this.
- 15. Natural process of hormonal changes in women's bodies.
- 18. Abbreviation for Spontaneous Coronary Artery Dissection.
- 20. Recommended 30 Minutes a day (minimum).

[Answer key click here!](#)

# ALL ABOUT YOU!



Today I read that butterflies rest when it rains because it damages their wings. It's okay to rest during the storms of life. You'll fly again when it's over.



Have feedback for us? Or a quote to share?  
Receive a \$10 GC for LifeInHearts.ca for sharing. Email Jackie@Heartlife.ca

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