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♡ Her Heart

DIGITAL MAGAZINE
ALL THINGS HEART HEALTH

WINTER 2025
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Welcome to the Her Heart Digital Magazine.

As the temperatures begin to drop, our hearts remain warm from the joy of celebrating our 10th Anniversary in May. In this edition, we're sharing highlights from the event, along with the latest updates in heart health.

We are committed to keeping you informed about all matters related to heart disease in women. You can look forward to a new edition of the Her Heart Digital Magazine each time the season changes.

Our community is at the heart of everything we do – and this magazine is created with you in mind. We would love to hear your thoughts and feedback, so please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Please reach out at hello@herheart.org

Warmest wishes,



Linda

Prof Linda Worrall-Carter,
Founder & CEO

ABOUT HER HEART

Her Heart is Australia's Peak Body and leading authority on cardiovascular disease in women.

As the only not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving women's heart health, Her Heart provides evidence-based education, supports health professionals, and leads advocacy and research to raise awareness and drive systemic change. We lose almost one woman every hour, that's 20 women a day – and it's one of the leading causes of death among Australian women. Her Heart is committed to ensuring every woman has access to life-saving knowledge, quality healthcare, and the support needed to prioritise their heart health.

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OUR MISSION

Her Heart's mission is to save women's lives by improving awareness, education, research, and advocacy around heart health, ensuring every woman has access to life-saving knowledge and care.

OUR ADVOCACY

Her Heart advocates for women's heart health as a top priority across multiple sectors. Through collaboration with government, philanthropy, healthcare, and industry partners, we work to improve outcomes for the everyday woman. In addition to this, we also work with and support health professionals.



BOOST YOUR IMMUNITY THIS WINTER

Practical ways to keep your immune system and heart health in shape this season.

For those in the southern hemisphere, as winter settles in, it brings colder days and longer nights. During this time, it's a natural time to slow down, reflect, and take extra care of your health. With the drop in temperature, the risk of colds, flu, and general fatigue rises – and so does the importance of a strong immune system.

What many don't realise is that immunity and heart health are closely linked. Chronic inflammation, often triggered by a weakened immune system, can increase the risk of heart disease. That's why maintaining your immunity during winter isn't just about avoiding sniffles – it's about protecting your heart too.

Here are some simple yet effective ways to support your immune system this winter:

Get Your Flu Shot

The flu virus spreads more easily in winter, and one of the most effective ways to protect yourself is by getting a flu shot. Influenza can spread quickly at any time but especially during autumn and winter, so ensuring you are vaccinated helps reduce your risk of severe symptoms and complications. Check with your healthcare provider or go to your local [Priceline](#) to book your vaccination.

Nourish Your Body

What you eat has a direct impact on your immune system. Winter is a great time to load up on nutrient-rich whole foods that support your gut microbiome, which plays a key role in immune response and inflammation.

Root vegetables like sweet potatoes, beets, and carrots are rich in vitamin C, B6, and folate. A balanced gut supports immune cell function and regulates inflammation, two key factors in heart health. Warm, hearty meals like soups and stews not only offer comfort but are also packed with protein and other immune-supporting nutrients. Herbal teas and broths can keep you hydrated and soothed during the colder months.

Craving for something warm in the cozy weather? Try the Tomato & Red Lentil Soup with Feta Crostoli recipe on page 13 – a perfect addition to your winter recipe book.

Prioritise Rest

Our bodies naturally crave more downtime during the colder months, but busy routines and lingering stress often get in the way. Studies show that chronic sleep deprivation increases the risk of high blood pressure and lead to heart disease.

Try winding down with a calming evening routine and aim for 7–9 hours of quality sleep. Gentle movement, mindfulness, and breathwork can also help reduce stress and support your overall wellbeing.

Small, consistent habits can make a big impact. This winter, take time to rest, nourish yourself, and stay warm – your immune system and your heart will thank you for it.

Easing Back into Movement:

How to Safely Exercise After the Flu



Your recovery checklist

Before resuming physical activity, check that:

- ☐ Your fever has been gone for at least 24–48 hours
- ☐ You're breathing easily at rest
- ☐ Your energy levels are returning to normal
- ☐ There's no lingering chest tightness or severe fatigue



There is often a surge of cold and flu cases during winter. While we know that rest is essential during recovery, returning to your exercise routine – at the right pace – can boost your mood, circulation, and overall wellbeing. But how do you know when it's time to start moving again? And how do you do it safely?

Whether you're a regular walker, a gym-goer, or someone just starting out, here's how to reintroduce exercise mindfully after a bout of flu – especially when your heart and immune system need a little extra care.

Listen to Your Body

After the flu, your body is still healing – so resist the urge to jump back in full throttle. Start with gentle activities like walking, stretching, or light yoga to gauge your energy levels. If you're still feeling tired, achy, or have lingering symptoms, give yourself more time to rest. Fatigue is your body's way of asking for a pause, not a push.

Start Slow, Build Steady

Once you feel stronger, ease back into exercise gradually. Choose low-impact options such as walking, stationary cycling, or modified bodyweight exercises. The goal is consistency, not intensity. Try short sessions a few times a week before increasing your pace or duration. This approach supports your immune system without overwhelming it.

Watch for Warning Signs

Pay close attention to how your body responds during and after activity. If you experience chest pain, dizziness, shortness of breath, or an unusually rapid heartbeat, stop immediately and seek medical advice. These could signal underlying health concerns, especially if you have a history of heart issues.

Speak with Your Doctor

Not sure if you're ready to exercise again? A quick consultation with your GP can provide peace of mind. They'll consider your flu symptoms, current health, and any pre-existing conditions, especially if there has been a strong history of cardiovascular disease.

Celebrating 10 years of Championing Women's Heart Health



On Friday 9 May 2025, Her Heart celebrated a significant milestone – its 10th anniversary – with an incredible event at Leonda by the Yarra, in Melbourne. The gathering brought together our community, health professionals, philanthropists and advocates all united in their commitment to advancing women's heart health.

Reflecting on a decade of impact

We were honoured to hear from two remarkable women



during the event's keynote sessions. Her Heart Founder & Director Prof. Linda Worrall-Carter reflected on a decade of impact and how Her Heart has grown into a strong, supportive community dedicated to championing women's heart health.

We also heard from Dr. Susan Alberti AC, who is a longstanding Her Heart Advisor, who spoke passionately about the vital role of advocacy in advancing women's health. Their insights reminded us of how far we've come – and the important work that still lies ahead.

We thank our supporters – Verve Portraits, Sisterhood Foundation, and AJL Fundraising Group – who generously provided raffle prizes and giveaways valued at over \$5,000. Their support helped make the day memorable and impactful.



Sharing inspiring & empowering heart journeys

We were moved by some of our community members who courageously shared their stories. This included Cindy McCall, Debra Clare, and Tabitha Tworek and the panel was chaired by Prof Worrall-Carter. Each story was a powerful reminder of the emotional and physical challenges women face – and the strength it takes to overcome them. They spoke about the critical need for support, education, and access to resources to help women prioritise their heart health. In addition to this, how Her Heart has played a critical role in their journeys, providing resources, information and being a trusted space for connection. Their voices inspired us all to keep the conversation going and ensure no woman feels alone in her heart health journey.

As Her Heart looks to the future, we remain steadfast in our mission to improve awareness, education, research, and advocacy around women's heart health, ensuring every woman has access to life-saving knowledge and care.

Talking with an expert

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Dr Anastasia Mihailidou is a Senior Hospital Scientist in the Department of Cardiology at Royal North Shore Hospital and Head of the Cardiovascular & Hormonal Research Laboratory at the Kolling Institute, she shares valuable insights to help us better understand and manage hypertension a key risk factor for heart disease.

Hypertension is often called the “silent killer”. Why is high blood pressure particularly concerning for women?

Hypertension or high blood pressure as it is commonly known often has no symptoms and this is why it is referred to as “silent killer” leading to over 10 million deaths each year worldwide. It is particularly important that women recognise hypertension is the primary risk factor for cardiovascular disease, as we know it is the leading cause of death for women.

There are also female-specific factors that can impact blood pressure, such as oral contraceptive use, pregnancy, menopause, and polycystic ovary syndrome. Other conditions more common in females include autoimmune diseases and fibromuscular dysplasia (abnormal development or growth of cells in the arterial walls that can cause vessels to narrow or bulge). For women who experience elevated blood pressure during pregnancy, it is particularly important to recognise that even if blood pressure returns to normal afterwards, ongoing monitoring is essential to help prevent heart disease. Their risk for heart disease can emerge years later, which is why it is vital to inform their physician or other health professionals. Strong clinical data shows that effective control of hypertension can reduce cardiovascular disease risk in women.

You emphasise the importance of blood pressure monitoring before menopause. What changes occur during this stage that make early detection so crucial?

Regular blood pressure monitoring at all ages is the best strategy to prevent cardiovascular disease. In fact, adopting a “Know Your Numbers” strategy. For example, normal blood pressure would be less than 120/80 mmHg (according to Heart Foundation Guidelines).



It is also considered important to know your cholesterol and blood glucose levels and weight as routine will prevent/reduce the high risk of cardiovascular disease for women during menopause. Although young women have lower blood pressure than men at the same age, research into sex differences shows that the increase in blood pressure across lifespan is steeper for women, starting as early as in their third decade. In addition, further research into sex differences for the risk of cardiovascular disease such as heart attack, heart failure and stroke show increased risk associated from lower blood pressure range (100-110 mmHg) in women compared to men (130-139 mmHg).

Most women have “pear-shaped” fat distribution pattern – more fat in hips and thighs rather than waist and central abdominal for men, which is associated with lower diabetes and cardiovascular disease risk. However, when women become obese before menopause, they have a greater risk of developing hypertension compared to men and why we ask women to have their blood pressure monitored. There have also been studies showing that women have greater age-related arterial stiffness which starts a decade earlier than men. Hypertension in midlife is associated with cognitive decline and dementia in women compared to similarly aged men with hypertension.

Talking with an expert

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Lifestyle plays a big role in blood pressure control. What are some of the key changes women can make to help keep their blood pressure in a healthy range?

Incorporating lifestyle modifications as part of the treatment plan can significantly assist women in maintaining control of their blood pressure. These include a balanced, high fibre diet, reducing the amount of alcohol, salt in their diet and avoid smoking. Engaging in physical activity, any type, regularly is key to cardiovascular health and longevity as well as assists in maintaining stable weight. Increased weight gain, especially near or after menopause is a major cardiovascular risk factor for women. Sleep time is also important as well as quality of sleep. Connecting with friends or engaging in a hobby encourages positive mental health. Women experience more anxiety and depression which have been shown to contribute to greater heart disease risk. Personalising management to ensure cultural sensitivities are maintained is key to adherence.

What are the most effective ways for women to measure their blood pressure accurately at home or in a clinical setting?

Using validated blood pressure monitors in both the clinic and home to measure BP is the first important step to accurate measurement. There are free websites such as STRIDEBP.org or ValidateBP.org which list monitors that have been confirmed. For women, measurement of blood pressure away from clinic is also recommended due to their experiencing “white-coat effect”. This can be achieved with either ambulatory blood pressure monitoring or home monitoring. The procedures for measuring blood pressure at home or in clinical setting are the same and it is important that they follow these procedures to ensure accurate measures. These include ensuring that you have not had coffee or tea for 30 mins before measurement, making sure you have an empty bladder and sitting with feet on floor (not crossed) and back supported. The arm that has the cuff applied should be supported and no talking during measurement by either physician or patient. Importantly, for home and clinic measurement, there should be five minutes rest.



On a personal note, what do you do to take care of your own heart health?

It has been 2 years since I lost my dear mother. It is vital that we all take care of our own heart health and for me it involves having an annual heart health check since I have higher risk of cardiovascular disease as my mother had hypertension during pregnancy. I did develop hypertension but with regular monitoring and medication, it is controlled. I ensure I walk a minimum of 30 minutes each day as well as balance and flexibility exercises. Simple squats while I am waiting for the lifts or using the stairs instead of lifts and walking. If I am having a challenging day, I will take 5 minutes to look at the sky and clouds and marvel at their formation. Having Greek heritage, I have a Mediterranean Greek diet and connect with family and friends. Social interaction is good for the heart as well as laughter as the saying goes “Laughter Is the Best Medicine”. My mother had no medical training but had strong positivity and am pleased to see that this is now being recognised as a common trait in super agers. I am trying to learn that skill as there have been many challenges but her legacy was to “Keep Going!”

Learn more and connect with Anastasia here:

- Website: <https://kollinginstitute.org.au>
- X (Twitter): @AnastasiaSMihai
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/anastasia-smihailidou>
- Bluesky: @anastasiasmihaili.bsky.social

Real stories: Nissa's Story with Sudden Cardiac Arrest

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I never imagined I'd be sharing a heart story – especially at 36 years old. I was active, healthy, and careful about what I put into my body. I exercised regularly, ate a heart-healthy diet, didn't smoke, and only drank alcohol occasionally. I had no major family history of heart disease. But in November 2024, I survived a sudden cardiac arrest – and it changed everything.

In the weeks leading up to it, I began experiencing strange, unexplainable episodes. I'd feel a sudden loss of sensation in my arms and limbs, overwhelming weakness, and would have to lie down, completely drained – unable even to lift my head. Each episode would pass within ten minutes, and then I'd feel totally normal again. The first time it happened, I went to the hospital. Everything looked fine, and I was sent home.

But the episodes didn't stop. Then, on the morning of November 13, I had four of them in a row. My husband knew something was seriously wrong, and he refused to let it go. He insisted we return to the hospital – and this time, he demanded they admit me.

Four days later, while I was still in the hospital, on November 17, I went into sudden cardiac arrest. The medical team was right there to start CPR immediately.

After extensive testing, there's still no clear explanation for what happened. The cause of my cardiac arrest remains unknown. That uncertainty is difficult, but it's also part of what I want others to understand: heart events don't always come with obvious warning signs or fit the typical profile. I was doing everything "right" – and it still happened.

I woke up from being intubated on November 18, 2024. It was my daughter's 8th birthday. There's a kind of magic in that. I truly believe I was meant to be here – to wake up on that day, to hold my children again, and to keep living this life.



Since then, I've made changes, I focus on rest, recovery, and being present. I've learned the power of self-advocacy

I have two young daughters – one is 8, and the other is 3. They need me, and I need them. I'm so grateful to still be here, watching them grow, loving them, and living each day with purpose and appreciation.

To read Nissa's message to the community, click [here](#). You can connect with her on Instagram [@icdandme](#).



Heart Strong

Caring for Your Heart Nurtures Your Whole Self



When we talk about wellbeing, we often think of balance – between work and rest, mind and body, self and others. But at the centre of it all is one vital organ quietly keeping rhythm: **your heart**. Heart health is a core part of how we feel, function, and thrive each day. Yet heart disease remains the leading cause of death among Australian women, often going unnoticed until it's too late. As we focus on living well, it's time to bring heart health into the centre of the wellbeing conversation – where it truly belongs. **Here's what our Founder, one of our Advisors and a community member has to say about putting heart health first.**



Small, healthy habits make a big difference!

- “ For me creating habits allow you to make change over time:
1. I meditate before I even get out of bed, every day and have done for 15 years
 2. I journal for 15 minutes every day (and have done for a year now)
 3. I prioritise sleep and don't do anything to disturb it (so I stopped drinking alcohol in January 25)
 4. I exercise each day - walk, and do pilates.



Four simple ways to care for your wellbeing:

1. **Get enough sleep:** Self-care drops when exhaustion hits. Rest is a non-negotiable.
2. **Eat well:** Every meal needs nutritious calories, including fresh fruit and veggies.
3. **Exercise regularly:** Move your body with intention. Even a brisk walk can do wonders for your heart and mood.
4. **Manage stress:** Pause, breathe, and unplug. Your heart thrives in calm, not chaos.



Emotional wellbeing fuels heart health.

- “ **Your mental and emotional well-being plays such a vital role in your heart health**, so it's no surprise that stress, anxiety, and depression are common risks for heart disease. Regardless of being born with a heart condition or being diagnosed later on in life, your heart health is imperative.

♥ **How are you looking after your heart and wellbeing?**

In the news:

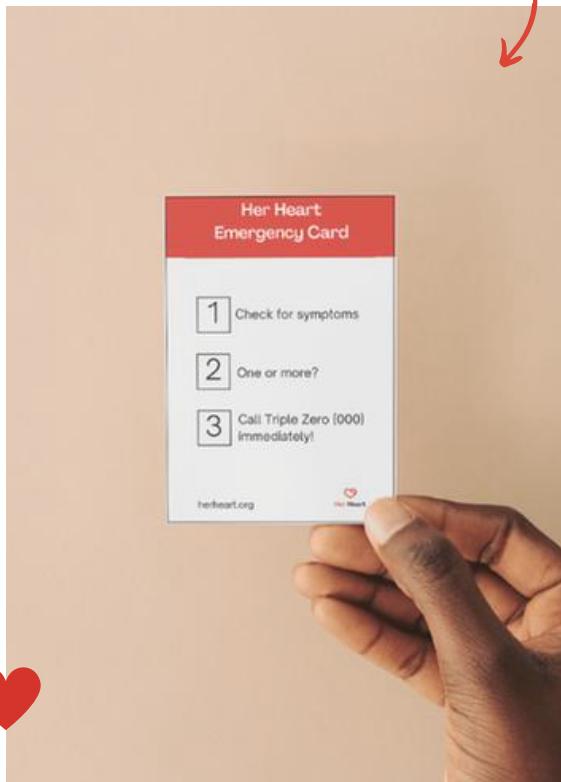
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Call 000, Save Your Life

A [Monash University study](#) has found that women are less comfortable calling 000 when experiencing heart attack symptoms, despite being more likely than men to seek emergency help.

Over one-third of women feared being a burden on ambulance services, compared to one-quarter of men. Many also hesitated, preferring to consult their GP first or believing they were at low risk.

We know women have different symptoms to men, to help women act quickly [download the Her Heart Wallet Card](#), a simple guide on recognising symptoms and knowing when to call 000. Early action saves lives.



The App That Saves lives

Are you a healthcare worker or first aid trained? The [GoodSAM app](#) could help you save a life! This global alert system notifies registered responders of nearby cardiac arrests. By signing up, you can provide life-saving CPR while an ambulance is on the way. For women, early intervention is crucial, so your quick response can make all the difference. [Sign up to today!](#)

Tiny Lifesaver

In the US, two-month-old Mikey Oliveri is thriving at home after receiving the world's smallest pacemaker. Born prematurely at just 2.5 kg, Mikey was diagnosed with congenital complete heart block, a rare condition that slows the heart's rhythm.

Thanks to groundbreaking medical innovation, doctors adapted a tiny, leadless pacemaker, normally used for adults to fit his needs, making him one of the youngest babies to receive it. The life-saving surgery in December 2024 meant he could go home just weeks later. Now happy and healthy with his family, Mikey's story is a powerful reminder of how advancing technology and expert care continues to transform lives.

[Read more about his story here.](#)



Her Heart's 10th Anniversary

Celebrating Her Heart's 10th Anniversary was a truly special moment. It's not often you get to stop, look around, and see the real impact of the work we do – but being in that room, surrounded by supporters, friends, members of our community, including advocates and health professionals. It really reminded me how far we've come together. Thank you to everyone who's walked this path with me – your belief in our mission is what keeps it all going. Here's to the next decade!

Looking Ahead

As we look to the future, I'm more motivated than ever to keep pushing for change. There is still so much to do to raise awareness, reach more women, especially those in remote and rural communities, and make heart health a priority in every stage of a woman's life. We will be expanding our education programs, amplifying more voices from our community and strengthening partnerships. It's only possible because of your incredible support and I can't wait to see what we will achieve together next.

What I have been reading

I was speaking to a very good friend asking who her favourite author was and she mentioned Kristin Hannah. She recommended *The Four Winds*, which completely pulled me in with its raw emotion and unforgettable characters

It was set during the Great Depression, and follows Elsa Martinelli, a woman who has always felt unwanted but finds incredible strength through hardship. Watching her sacrifice everything for her children, endure unimaginable suffering, and still keep going was both heart-breaking (as Hannah made the struggles of this era feel painfully real) but it was also inspiring.

A favourite quote was "Jack says I am a warrior ... sounds like motherhood to me" (p.426). Being a mother, I felt every ounce of her love and determination.

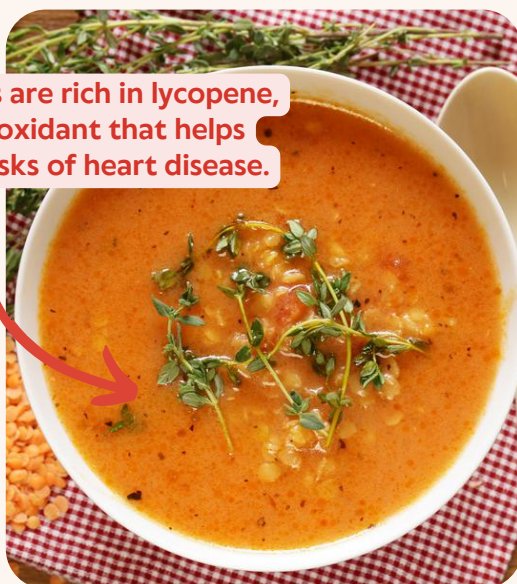




Tomato & Red Lentil Soup with Feta Crostoli

A nourishing, heart-friendly soup perfect for cozy winter evenings

Tomatoes are rich in lycopene, an antioxidant that helps reduce risks of heart disease.



Why this meal is good for your heart:

- **Red Lentils:** High in dietary fibre and plant-based protein, which can help lower cholesterol levels and support heart health.
- **Tomatoes:** Rich in lycopene, an antioxidant linked to reduced risk of heart disease.
- **Extra virgin olive oil:** Contains monounsaturated fats that are beneficial for heart health.
- **Wholegrain baguette:** Provides additional fibre, which is important for cardiovascular health.

You'll need:

For the Soup

- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 1 brown onion, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 3 x 400g cans diced tomatoes
- 1 litre (4 cups) low-sodium vegetable stock
- 175g (¾ cup) split red lentils, rinsed
- Ground black pepper, to taste

For the Feta Crostoli

- 1 small wholegrain baguette, thinly sliced
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 100g reduced-fat feta cheese, mashed
- 1 tablespoon finely grated lemon zest
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

Method:

1. Prepare the Soup:
 - Heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil in a large saucepan over medium heat.
 - Add the chopped onion and crushed garlic; sauté for 5 minutes or until softened.
 - Stir in the diced tomatoes and vegetable stock; bring to a boil.
 - Add the rinsed red lentils; reduce heat to low and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 20 minutes or until lentils are tender and the soup has thickened.
 - Season with freshly ground black pepper to taste.
2. Prepare the Feta Crostoli:
 - While the soup is simmering, preheat a grill pan over medium-high heat.
 - Brush both sides of the baguette slices with olive oil.
 - Grill the bread slices for 2–3 minutes on each side or until toasted.
 - Spread the mashed feta cheese over the toasted baguette slices.
 - Sprinkle with lemon zest and chopped parsley.
3. Serve:
 - Ladle the hot soup into serving bowls.
 - Serve with the prepared feta crostoli on the side.
 - Drizzle a little extra virgin olive oil over the soup if desired.



Her Heart acknowledges Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present of all communities who also work and live on this land.

 **Her Heart**

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