Heart to Heart



MAGAZINE

Candid conversations
towards better heart health

DECEMBER 2025
ISSUE NO. 13

Welcome to the Her Heart digital magazine

As we mark ten years of Her Heart, I am proud of how far we have come together. What began as an idea to raise awareness of women's heart health has become a national movement changing how heart disease in women is understood and addressed.

Every edition of Heart to Heart is an opportunity to connect, reflect, and inspire action. Inside, you will find stories of strength, research that informs change, and practical ways to care for your heart and wellbeing.

Our mission remains the same: to ensure every woman has access to life-saving knowledge, quality care, and the confidence to prioritise her heart health.

Thank you for being part of this growing community. Together, we are creating a future where fewer women lose their lives to heart disease.

Warmest wishes,

Prof. Linda Worrall-Carter

Founder, Director & CEO,
Her Heart



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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 – or 20 women a day – to heart disease, which remains 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**.



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 women. In addition to driving change, we also support health professionals.

A gentle reset

Small habits to lower your stress and protect your heart



For many women, days blur under to-do lists, back-to-back meetings, and the constant pressure to be “on.” A gentle reset can help you pause, breathe, and reconnect with yourself.

Burnout isn’t just a buzzword. It’s a real, growing health issue. Chronic stress can raise blood pressure, disrupt hormones, interfere with sleep, and increase your risk of heart disease. If you’ve been feeling stretched thin, emotionally flat, or physically run down, your body might be telling you it’s time to pause.

These small steps can help you feel more grounded and in control:

Reclaim your mornings
Before the world asks something of you, give yourself something first: peace. Even 10 minutes outside in the sun, stretching, reading, or moving your body gently can shift your mindset and energy for the rest of the day.

Reset in micro-moments
Balance doesn’t require a big break. Start with “micro-pauses”: 2-minute deep breathing sessions between meetings, stepping away from your desk for a stretch, or switching off screens during lunch. These tiny resets lower your stress response over time.

Declutter your calendar
Overcommitment is a fast track to exhaustion. Say no to one thing this week that drains you. Create more space for rest, connection, or simply doing nothing.

Create tech boundaries
Your attention is precious. Constant pings and pop-ups can scatter your focus and keep your nervous system in a state of alert. Try turning off non-essential notifications, setting app limits, or carving out screen-free windows in your day.

Book your heart check-up
When you’re always looking after others, it’s easy to put your health last. Book in with your GP for a check-up, especially if you're experiencing fatigue or irregular symptoms. These could be signs your body needs support.

You don’t need to change everything at once. Start by listening to your body and choose one small shift that brings more ease into your day. Which habit will you try first? Share it with our Her Heart community group here.

Hay fever and your heart

Most people have heard of allergic rhinitis - or ‘hay fever’. If you aren’t affected by it yourself, you likely know someone who is. Almost 24 percent of Australians are affected by hay fever, which is often at its worst during the spring and early summer months when pollen counts are at their highest.

Typically characterised by a runny or blocked nose, sneezing and coughing, and itchy, red, or watery eyes, hay fever can be a significant hindrance during the warmer months and affects women in particular more commonly.

What many people don’t know is that hay fever can actually impact heart health. It’s important to understand what you can do to manage your allergies and protect your heart.



A history of allergic disorders, including hay fever, can increase the risk of heart disease.
Allergies are associated with inflammation in the body, as immune responses are triggered when the body fights off allergens like pollen. Over time, as immune responses are triggered again and again, chronic inflammation can cause damage to the heart and blood vessels, increasing the risk of heart disease.

Asthma can increase the risk of heart disease.
Allergens can trigger asthma, which is a chronic inflammation of the airways characterised by coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath. This inflammation can also contribute to heart disease through repeated strain on the cardiovascular system.

Some allergy medications can have side effects that impact the heart.
Decongestants are a common allergy medication used to relieve the symptoms of hay fever. Many of these medications contain an ingredient called pseudoepinephrine, which works by narrowing the blood vessels in the nasal passages to reduce swelling and congestion.
A side effect of this is an increase in heart rate, which may exacerbate arrhythmias and blood pressure. Decongestants can also interfere with certain heart medications, so you should always consult your doctor or pharmacist before taking a new medication.

Now that we've explored the risks associated with hay fever and heart disease, here's how you can manage your symptoms mindfully to protect your heart health.

Manage your symptoms
Try to minimise your exposure to allergens like pollen by keeping windows and doors closed, showering and changing clothes after being outside, wearing sunglasses, putting vaseline around your nostrils, using air purifiers, and staying inside on days with high pollen counts.

Know your levels and family history
Be aware of your cholesterol and blood pressure levels. Knowing your family history of heart disease can help you manage the risks.

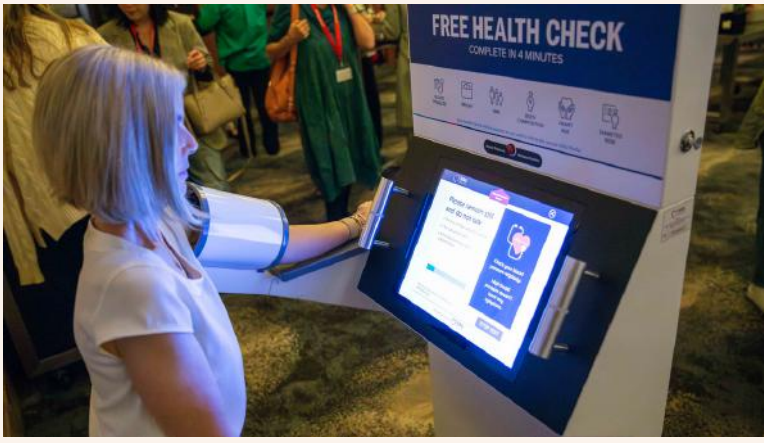
Be mindful when taking medications
Speak to your doctor or pharmacist before taking any new medications, and use those decongestants with pseudoephepinephrine sparingly.

Get the right diagnosis
Many people may think they have allergies when they are actually having asthma, or vice versa. Check in with your doctor to get the right diagnosis so you can manage your symptoms accordingly.

Listen to you body
Don't ignore symptoms. While a fast heart rate is typically not a cause for concern, you should seek medical support if you experience shortness of breath, fainting, chest pain, palpitations, or any other symptoms that just don't feel right.







A recap of the 2025 Her Heart Conference

Changing the Narrative: Innovation and Impact in Women's Heart Health

This October, the Her Heart Conference once again brought together Australia's leading minds and hearts in women's cardiovascular health. Held at the iconic Grand Hyatt Melbourne, this year's theme was Changing the Narrative: Innovation and Impact in Women's Heart Health. We celebrated progress, challenged gaps, and inspired new approaches to improving care for women.

There were powerful presentations and discussions on closing the gender gap in diagnosis and treatment, exploring the latest research, emerging trends, and system challenges shaping the future of care. With a diverse mix of health professionals, researchers, policymakers, and community members, the program was both informative and deeply engaging.

With a diverse mix of health professionals and community members, the program was both informative and deeply engaging, covering obesity, hypertension, smoking, sleep apnoea, cardio-oncology, acute coronary syndrome, women's participation in research, and more.

A huge thank you to our wonderful MC Sophie Scott OAM, Platinum Sponsor CSL Seqirus, and Silver Sponsors Abbott, Novartis, Bloom Women's Health, Boston Scientific, and the Heart Foundation for making this event possible. Thank you also to every speaker and attendee for lending your expertise, time, and passion to this vital national conversation.

Stay tuned for next year's Her Heart Conference as we continue to drive innovation, equity, and empowerment in women's heart health.



Check out the resources

The surprising connection between your gums and your heart

Hear from Dr. Victoria Lane, practice owner and Newcastle's only fully qualified cosmetic dentist, as she shares insights on the surprising connection between heart disease and gum health.

Can you explain the connection between oral health and heart disease?

Many of my patients are often taken aback when I suggest their oral health could affect their heart. The link between the two might not be immediately obvious, but it's real. When you have gum disease or inflamed gums, bacteria can easily enter the bloodstream through tiny cuts or swollen areas in the mouth. Once in the bloodstream, these bacteria can travel to the heart, where they have the potential to do serious damage. They can attach themselves to fatty plaques in the arteries, contribute to plaque buildup, or even settle on weakened heart valves. The result? Increased risk of heart attacks, strokes, and other cardiovascular complications.



Dr. Victoria Lane, Platinum Dental

How does gum disease contribute to inflammation in the body, and what role does this play in cardiovascular health?

When plaque builds up on your teeth and hardens into tartar, it can irritate your gums. As your body fights off this bacterial invasion, it releases cytokines immune molecules designed to trigger inflammation. While this is a natural defence, it has unintended consequences. These cytokines don't stay in your mouth; they circulate through your bloodstream, causing systemic inflammation. This is where things get concerning for your heart health.

KEY FEATURE

Chronic inflammation in the arteries can make them more susceptible to plaque buildup, which, in turn, can lead to plaque rupture and the formation of blood clots. This is a direct path to heart disease. Studies show that people with gum disease have a significantly higher risk of cardiovascular problems like heart attacks and strokes. The inflammation from gum disease doesn't just stay localised; it spreads, creating a silent but dangerous risk to your heart.



Are there specific groups of women who are more at risk of heart complications due to poor oral health?

While everyone can be at risk, some women are particularly vulnerable to heart complications from poor oral health. Let's break it down:

Postmenopausal women are especially susceptible due to the drop in estrogen levels, which can cause dry mouth and thinner gum tissues, making it easier for bacteria to take hold. This combination of factors puts them at a higher risk of gum disease, which, in turn, increases the risk of heart disease and stroke.



Women with diabetes face a double whammy: they're already more prone to inflammation and infection, which makes them more susceptible to gum disease. The inflammation triggered by gum disease can further complicate their risk for heart disease, creating a vicious cycle.

Pregnant women are also at higher risk due to hormonal changes that increase blood flow to the gums, making them more prone to gum disease and infection. This can elevate the risk of complications like preterm birth and also increase the long-term risk of cardiovascular issues.

Smokers: If you smoke, your gums aren't getting the blood flow they need, making them more vulnerable to infection. Smoking also damages the blood vessels, further contributing to cardiovascular risks.

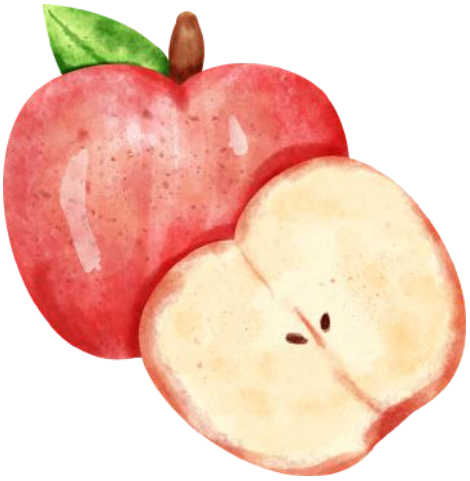
What practical steps can women take to protect their oral health and, in turn, reduce their heart disease risk?

The good news is that there are simple and effective steps you can take to safeguard both your mouth and your heart. Here's what I recommend:

Brush twice daily and floss before bed. These basic habits are crucial for keeping your teeth and gums healthy. Don't skip out on flossing, it's one of the best ways to remove bacteria from between your teeth where your toothbrush can't reach.

Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. A diet rich in fruits and vegetables isn't just good for your overall health, it can help maintain the health of your gums by providing essential nutrients that support your immune system.

Visit your dentist at least every 6 months. Regular checkups allow your dentist to identify any issues early and prevent them from becoming bigger problems. If you have gum disease, early intervention can keep it from affecting your heart.

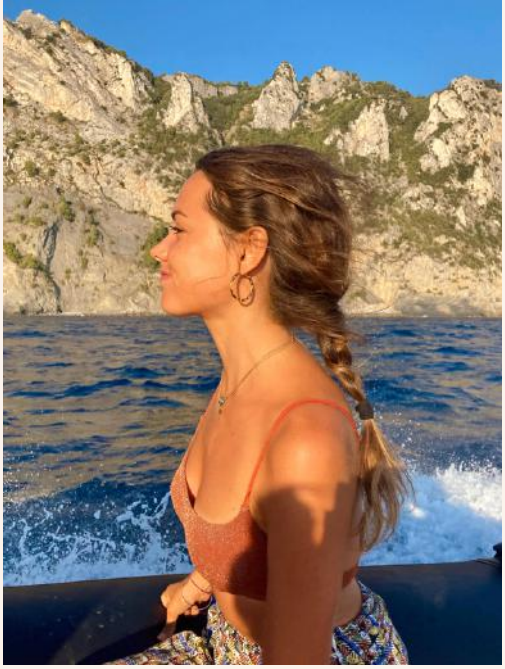


Quit smoking (or never start!). Smoking is one of the most harmful things you can do for both your oral and cardiovascular health. The good news is that quitting will improve circulation to your gums and reduce inflammation.

Manage stress. Stress weakens your immune system, making it harder for your body to fight off infections like gum disease. Finding ways to relax —whether it's through yoga, deep breathing, or a walk in the park—can significantly help your overall well-being.

Learn more about Dr Victoria Lane here

Francesca's journey with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy



My journey with heart disease began when I was diagnosed with cardiomyopathy (significantly large heart) at just 24 years old. **Deep down, I had always felt something was not quite right, but hearing the diagnosis was still a shock.**

My journey with heart disease began when I was diagnosed with cardiomyopathy (significantly large heart) at just 24 years old. Deep down, I had always felt something was not quite right, but hearing the diagnosis was still a shock.

At the time, I was about to graduate in physical education, and the news made me question everything, especially if I was on the right path. With so much on my mind, I decided to travel—to Australia and then London—to work, explore, and figure things out.



Initially, I did not take my condition seriously. It took me some time to truly understand and accept how serious it was.

In 2019, I returned to Italy, where I now live and work. By then, my condition had worsened, and doctors strongly recommended that I get an S-ICD implant as a safety net—a "parachute," as they called it. I agreed, even though I thought I would never actually need it.

That device ended up saving my life. After this experience, I decided to open an Instagram page, **@livingwiththesicd,** to support and inspire others facing similar challenges.

Through the page, I connect with patients and their loved ones worldwide, sharing my journey and offering encouragement to those making tough decisions about their health.

We'd love to hear your story. Share it with us here.

The soothing practice of Shirin-Yoku

As we step into a new season, many of us feel the pull to get outside. A walk in the park, a moment in the garden, or simply sitting in the sun—it all feels good. But more than that, science shows it's also good for us.

In Japan, "shinrin-yoku" (forest bathing) is a well-known form of preventive healthcare. It's not exercise or hiking, but the simple act of being quietly present in nature. And the benefits are real.

A 40-minute walk in a cedar forest has been shown to lower stress hormones, reduce blood pressure, and improve immunity, more so than the same walk indoors. Trees even release natural compounds called phytoncides, which calm the nervous system and support immune health.

No forest? No problem.
Nature is often closer than we think. A tree-lined street, a park bench, or your local garden can offer many of the same calming effects. Just being around greenery, birds or sunlight can help ease stress and lift your mood.

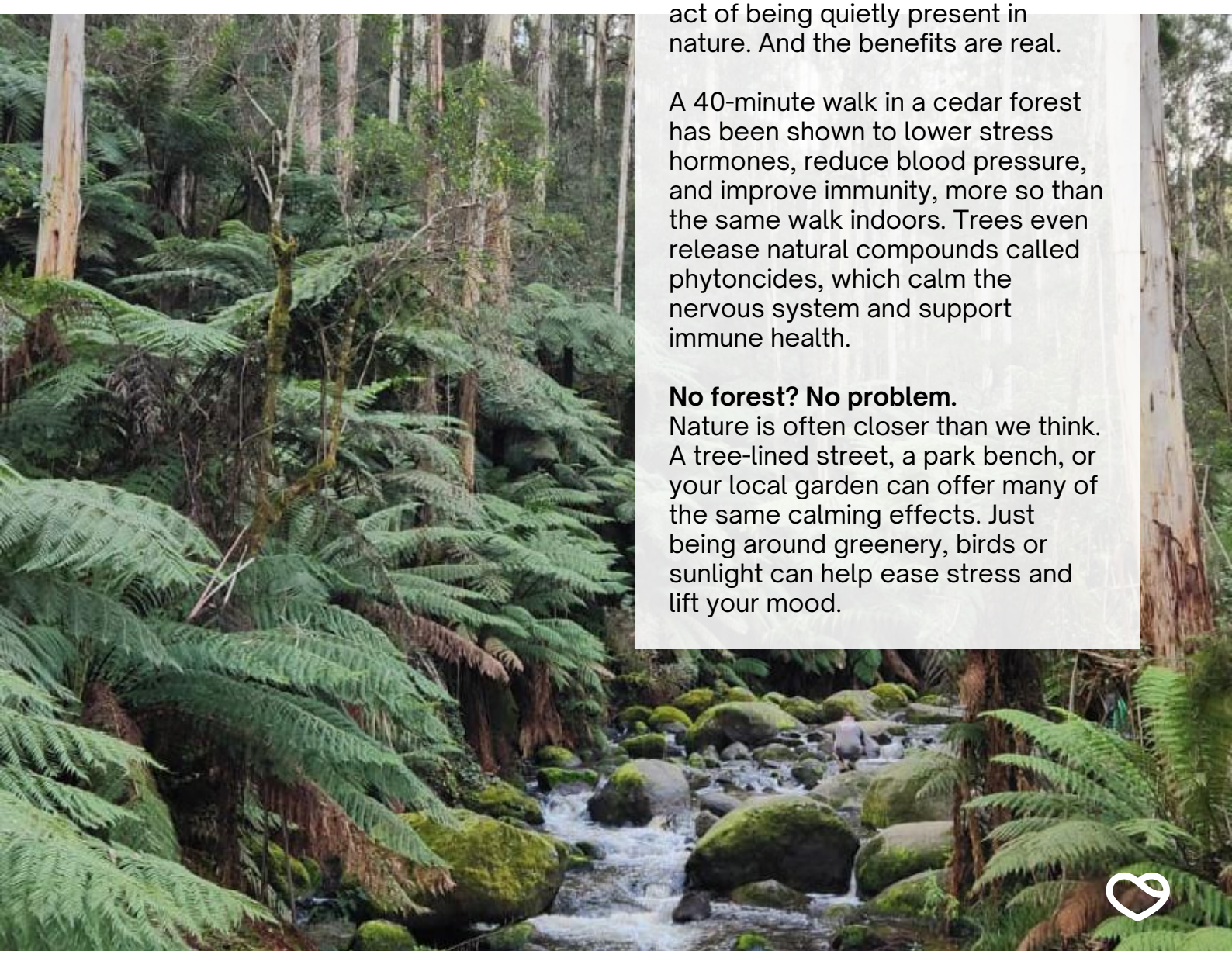


Photo: *The Toorongo Falls walk near Noojee, Victoria*

In the news

Read the study

A recent study published in Nature uncovered important gender-specific insights into cardiovascular disease (CVD) in women.

Results found that women were more likely to suffer from valvular heart disease (VHD) than men. They were affected at considerably younger ages, took longer to receive treatment, had poorer outcomes, and presented with different symptoms compared to men.

These numbers are just the tip of the iceberg and show a step in the right direction towards increasing the representation of women in research studies.

Emerging research reveals mammograms may indicate a woman's risk for heart disease.

Specifically, breast arterial calcification (BAC), visible on mammograms, has been linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular issues, including stroke.

In New York, doctors are analysing mammograms for BAC as part of a proactive approach to women's cardiovascular health. This initiative has already led to life-saving interventions. One patient's mammogram revealed BAC, prompting further heart evaluations that uncovered a severe artery blockage. Thanks to timely intervention, her life was saved.



Read more

5 mins with Prof. Linda





Global Heart Hub's 5th Unite Annual Summit

Early in November, I had the opportunity to attend and speak at the Global Heart Hub's 5th Unite Annual Summit in Dublin, Ireland.

It was such an energising few days - connecting with people from around the world who share the same passion for improving women's heart health.

I joined a panel and also led a roundtable discussion, which sparked some really valuable ideas about how we can move from talk to action.

A big thank you to Neil Johnson and the Global Heart Hub team for the invitation and for creating such a collaborative and inspiring event.

ACvA Forum

I recently attended the ACvA Members' Forum, which brought together leaders and researchers from across Australia's cardiovascular community.

It was a valuable opportunity to hear updates on the MRFF Cardiovascular Health Mission and the Draft National Health and Medical Research Strategy, and to take part in small group discussions on these priorities.

It was also wonderful to reconnect with colleagues and contribute to the ongoing conversation about strengthening research and collaboration across the sector.

Angela Wheelton

I want to take a moment to acknowledge the incredible contribution of Angela Wheelton OAM, who served as Chair of the Her Heart Board and was a long-time supporter through the Wheelton Group/ Foundation.



Angela's leadership, generosity, and kindness were pivotal in helping Her Heart continue during the Pandemic - a very difficult time.

At our 10th Anniversary celebration, Angela was posthumously recognised with a special award for her outstanding contribution and belief in our mission. Her legacy will always be part of Her Heart's story.

The 100+ Hearts Project



We are proud to acknowledge Ronda Hazell, a talented textile artist and passionate supporter of women's heart health, whose work is helping raise awareness of heart disease in women through the 100+ Hearts Project.

Ronda's project invites people across Australia and beyond to create and share fabric squares featuring handmade hearts. Each heart represents a woman affected by heart disease - a silent yet significant cause of death among Australian women.

Thank you, Ronda, for continuing to support Her Heart in such a heartfelt and meaningful way.

You can follow along with Ronda's 100+ Hearts Project via her Instagram @anakiequilter.



HER HEART KITCHEN

Berries are a great source of antioxidants!



Berry & chia breakfast parfait

A delicious and healthy treat that is perfect for breakfast, a snack, or even as a dessert!

Why it's good for your heart:

- **Fibre from chia seeds and berries** helps lower cholesterol and supports healthy digestion.
- **Omega-3 fatty acids in chia seeds and nuts** reduce inflammation and promote healthy blood vessels.
- **Calcium in Greek yoghurt** supports strong bones and may help regulate blood pressure.



For the chia pudding:

- 3 tbsp chia seeds
- 1 cup milk of choice
- ½ tsp vanilla extract (optional)
- 1 tsp honey or maple syrup (optional)

For the layers:

- 1 cup Greek yoghurt (or coconut yoghurt for dairy-free)
- 1 cup mixed berries (fresh or thawed)
- ½ cup granola

Method:

1. Make the chia pudding: In a bowl or jar, mix chia seeds, milk, vanilla, and sweetener if using. Stir well and let sit for 5 minutes.
2. Stir again to prevent clumping, then refrigerate for at least 1 hour or overnight until thickened.
3. Assemble the parfaits: In two jars or glasses, layer spoonfuls of chia pudding, yoghurt, berries, and granola.

Store: Keep covered in the fridge for up to 3 days. Add granola just before eating to keep it crunchy.

Optional Toppings & Add-Ins:
This is a very versatile recipe, so feel free to change things up. Get creative and make it your own! Why not try:

- Coconut flakes
- Chopped nuts (like almonds, walnuts, or pecans)
- Pumpkin seeds
- Cacao nibs
- Sliced banana

It's a great way to start your day off on the right foot or satisfy your sweet tooth without feeling guilty.



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DECEMBER 2025 | ISSUE NO. 13 | HERHEART.ORG

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.