



# THE WHOLE YOU MONTHLY

A monthly guide to nurturing your full wellbeing: financial, physical, mental, or social. Each issue delivers timely, seasonal insights and custom articles to help you thrive both inside and outside of work.

**February 2026 Issue**

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

February is the perfect month to give your heart the attention it deserves. This issue highlights simple habits that help strengthen your heart and boost your overall wellbeing.

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# Eating smart for a healthy heart

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S., but healthier food choices and increased exercise can significantly improve your cardiovascular health. This article highlights practical diet habits to help strengthen your heart and overall health.

## Focus on heart-healthy foods

- **Fruits and vegetables** are low in calories and saturated fat, and are a key source of fiber, vitamins, and minerals. They can help lower blood pressure and support healthier cholesterol levels. Keeping produce prepped and washed makes healthy snacking quick and easy.
- **Whole grains** provide fiber and other nutrients that support heart health. Whole-grain bread, brown rice, oats, and popcorn can boost energy and improve digestion.
- **Fiber-rich foods** help lower LDL (“bad”) cholesterol and keep you feeling full. Options include apples, pears, berries, nuts, seeds, and vegetables paired with bean-based dips.
- **Omega-3 fatty acids** can reduce inflammation and improve blood pressure. Fish, walnuts, chia seeds, and flaxseeds are Omega-3 sources recommended by the American Heart Association (AHA).

## What to limit

- **Saturated fats**, commonly found in fatty meats, full-fat dairy products, and fried foods, can raise cholesterol levels. Choose lean proteins and plant-based fats when possible.
- **Sodium** can increase blood pressure when consumed in excess. Packaged and processed foods are often high in sodium, so try using herbs, spices, citrus, and vinegar instead.
- **Added sugars and highly processed foods**, such as sugary beverages, refined grains, and packaged snacks, should be limited to align with AHA guidance.

## Healthy snacking

Choose snacks that boost energy and provide nutrients. Substituting fruits for pastries, nuts for chips, and incorporating whole-grain chips and crackers with healthy toppings can positively impact your overall health.

## Don't forget to stay active

The AHA emphasizes balancing the calories you consume with the calories you burn. While nutrition labels are based on a 2,000-calorie diet, individual needs vary. Use online calculators or consult with your doctor to find out how many calories you need in a typical day. Regular physical activity supports weight management and strengthens cardiovascular health.

SMALL, CONSISTENT CHANGES CAN GO A LONG WAY TOWARD IMPROVING LONG-TERM HEART HEALTH.



### Sources:

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[foodandfriends.org/heart-health-nutritious-snacking](https://foodandfriends.org/heart-health-nutritious-snacking)

**QUICK TIP:** A BRISK 10-MINUTE WALK DURING BREAKS BOOSTS HEART HEALTH AND MOOD.



## Heart health: Stay strong in the fast lane

The demands of modern life can challenge your heart health. This month, we're sharing tips to keep your cardiovascular system in top shape.

### High blood pressure & hypertension

Hypertension is the "silent killer," often showing no symptoms but increasing risks for heart disease and stroke.

Know your numbers	Risk factors	Action steps
Normal blood pressure is under 120/80 mmHg.	Stress, poor diet, smoking, and lack of exercise.	Use a reliable monitor and reduce sodium intake with fresh foods like salads, fruits, and unsalted nuts.

### Partner with a healthcare provider

Regular checkups help detect issues like high cholesterol early and offer tailored advice for stress and prevention.

### Utilize telehealth

Members who need to manage chronic conditions like hypertension, prediabetes, and diabetes from home have access to virtual care.

- 24/7 access to care
- Personalized plans
- Convenience

## Is intermittent fasting safe for the heart?

Intermittent fasting involves scheduled periods throughout the day or week without eating. It offers numerous benefits to the body and is a popular method for weight loss. However, its effectiveness depends on the type of fasting, as there are pros and cons, and each person's body is different.

There are various types of fasting. Some methods include:

- **Daily window fast:** This involves eating between certain hours of the day, such as between noon and 6 pm, or 10 am and 5 pm.
- **Weekly fast:** This involves eating on a regular schedule throughout most days of the week but having one or two days with fewer meals.
- **Prolonged fast:** This involves going without food for more than 24 hours, which can extend up to 40 days with just water.

### The benefits of going without food

Many people adopt fasting regimens for weight loss purposes. Omitting food for long hours has been shown to reduce caloric intake, blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels. The body begins burning stored fat as fuel rather than the carbohydrates consumed on a regular schedule.

Fasting has also been linked to hinder cancer cell growth. Cancer cells feed on glucose, and without much of it present during fasting, they starve. The body's cells also conserve energy by metabolizing insulin and removing glucose from the blood. Fasting puts a strain on cells and promotes cell regeneration, also known as autophagy, which works as a vacuum to destroy damage or any abnormal cells.



## Health problems associated with fasting

A study conducted by the American Heart Association discovered that people who ate in less than an 8-hour window had a 91% higher risk of dying from cardiovascular disease. This risk was found in those already diagnosed with heart disease or cancer. Researchers also noted that time-restricted eating did not reduce the risk of death in these patients.

The study did not analyze the type of foods consumed by participants, as certain diets can greatly contribute to health problems. In summary, the study concluded that fasting provides short-term benefits but can cause long-term health problems.

Prolonged fasting is considered riskier than other short-term fasting. While it is beneficial for insulin levels to decrease, especially for those who are diabetic, it can lead to sodium deficiencies due to the lack of food and excessive water consumption. An abnormally low sodium in the blood is called hyponatremia. Symptoms include nausea, headaches, loss of energy, spasms, and in severe cases, seizures, and coma. Hyponatremia also lowers blood pressure, making the heart work harder to pump blood, which can lead to heart failure.

Yet, it is still possible for people to consistently incorporate prolonged fasting into their diet regimen. Dieticians recommend combatting the consequences of prolonged fasting by taking electrolytes to maintain sodium levels in the blood stream. These electrolyte minerals will not increase calories but will keep sodium present in the body.

## Should you fast?

It depends. Although there are many types of fasting, it is important to consult a doctor to ensure that your body can handle long periods without food. Those diagnosed with a health issue should stick to a short-term window fast. If it is your first time fasting, it is best to start by omitting one meal a day rather than restricting all meals so that the body can adjust. Once you find what works best for you, the benefits of fasting can significantly improve your life.

A RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL THAT FOLLOWED 100 OBESE INDIVIDUALS FOR ONE YEAR DID NOT FIND INTERMITTENT FASTING TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE THAN DAILY CALORIE RESTRICTION.

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## FEATURED RECIPE

### Peanut chicken protein bowls

This high-protein, healthy dinner is great to meal prep at the beginning of the week, then assemble and enjoy all week long.



#### Ingredients

- 1 large sweet potato, peeled, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 1 large red onion, finely chopped
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 (6- to 8-ounce) boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 small garlic clove, finely chopped
- Juice of 1 lime
- 2 tablespoons creamy peanut butter
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 tablespoon reduced-sodium soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil
- 4 cups cooked brown rice
- 1 avocado, thinly sliced
- 2 cups baby spinach
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 teaspoon toasted sesame seeds

#### Instructions

1. Arrange a rack in center of oven; preheat to 425 F. On a large baking sheet, toss potatoes and onion with 1 tablespoon olive oil; season with salt and pepper.
2. Bake potatoes until tender, 20 to 25 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, in a large skillet over medium-high heat, heat 1 tablespoon olive oil. Season chicken with garlic powder, ginger, salt, and pepper. Cook chicken, turning occasionally, until golden brown and an instant-read thermometer inserted into thickest part registers 165 F, about 8 minutes per side. Transfer to a cutting board. Let rest 10 minutes, then thinly slice.
4. In a small bowl, whisk garlic, lime juice, peanut butter, honey, and soy sauce. Whisk in sesame oil and remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil until smooth.
5. Divide rice among bowls. Top with potato mixture, chicken, avocado, and spinach. Sprinkle with cilantro and sesame seeds. Drizzle with dressing.

#### Source:

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