Love Makes the Heart Grow Stronger

February is National Heart Health Month. It is also known for being the month for Love. How do these two things go hand in hand? Well, no other organ in the human body can measure up to the heart’s social reputation. References to the heart paint our pop culture — sonnets (“How do I love thee?”), songs (“My Heart Will Go On,” “Hungry Heart”), everyday idioms (“heart of gold,” “broken heart”). Most of the heart’s fame, of course, comes from its connection to good old L-O-V-E.

So it’s a bit of scientific serendipity that the act of loving another — be it your mom, your spouse, your pup, your BFF — actually improves your heart health. Read on to find out how and why a little lovin’ helps your ticker.

Spending Time with a Loved One Lowers Blood Pressure

Not like you need another excuse to veg out with your best friend or cozy up with your significant other, but here’s one anyway. A study in the journal Psychosomatic Medicine found that people who spent time with their romantic partners experienced a greater dip in blood pressure than those who hung out with a stranger. Researchers correlated the blood pressure drop to sweet silence — less talking and more “perceived emotional support,” like the kind you would get from someone who knows you really well, so you could easily experience the same benefits from hanging out with your partner in crime as you would with a marital partner.

Don’t forget to sign up!! The more the merrier!!
Come join everyone else and see what all the fun is about!!
Have you been there before? Share your stories with everyone.
Have you not? Make some memories!

Feb 1st- Cathedral Basilica Tour        Feb 2nd- Anheuser Busch Brewery Tour
Feb 8th- Movie @ Plaza Frontenac        Feb 9th- Eagle Watching
Feb 15th- Trader Joes/ World Market    Feb 16th- St Louis Artist Guild Exhibit

Birthday Celebrations for February: Cathy and Walt

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**Your Heart Gets a Workout When it Goes Pitter-Patter**

When you lock eyes with the person who makes your heart race — whether it’s a new crush or the love of your life — your brain releases hormones such as dopamine, adrenaline, and norepinephrine, which make your heart beat faster and stronger. These short-lived spikes can train your heart to pump blood more efficiently, similar to the way aerobic exercise would (though to a lesser extent, of course). Yep, you still need to hit the treadmill no matter how much love you have in your life.

**Hugs Are Good for the Heart**

Could a hug a day keep the doctor away? When you partake in a warm embrace with someone you love (like a parent, child, or spouse), your body releases oxytocin, the feel-good hormone, which has the power to reduce stress hormones and lower blood pressure, according to research from the University of North Carolina. So let’s all make it a habit to give each other a big hug when we meet for activities, dinner or any other occasion at The Rockwood.

**Laughter Makes Your Blood Flow More Freely**

Have you had a good laugh yet today? Call up a good friend or family member, stat! Recent research from the University Of Maryland School of Medicine presented at the 2011 European Society of Cardiology (ESC) annual conference found a link between mental stress and the narrowing of blood vessels, which can restrict blood flow and lead to atherosclerosis. Laughter, however, had the opposite effect. So get the pals you love most together for a good chuckle more often. For the study, participants watched segments of a funny movie, like “There’s Something About Mary” on one day and a stressful movie such as “Saving Private Ryan” on another day. The stressful film caused vasoconstriction, or narrowing of the blood vessels, while the comedy caused the vessels to expand. “The magnitude of change we saw in the endothelium [blood vessel lining] after laughing was consistent and similar to the benefit we might see with aerobic exercise or statin use,” Michael Miller MD, a professor of medicine and lead investigator, said in a release from the ESC. So get your friends together and let’s go watch “The Comedian” this month at Plaza Frontenac!!

**Love Letters Can Lower Cholesterol**

Feeling love is one thing, but writing about it appears to be a completely different way of reaping the health benefits. In two randomized, controlled trials published in Human Communication Research, healthy college students who spent 20 minutes writing about their affection for loved ones (friends, relatives, and/or romantic partners) experienced significant drops in total cholesterol (the mean cholesterol levels reduced from 170 mg/dL to 159 mg/dL), while students in the control group, who wrote about random topics, did not. Try it out! Fill out the inside of a card you make with Kathy with sentimental thoughts and share it with loved ones!

**A Positive Attitude Reduces Heart Attack Risk**

Research published in the European Heart Journal shows that having a positive outlook on life can protect against cardiovascular disease. The researchers defined “positive affect” as feeling joy, happiness, excitement, enthusiasm, and contentment, all of which may stem from having people you love in your life. Researchers measured each participant’s level of positive affect based on a 12-minute in-person interview and checked health records over the following 10 years to look for incidences of cardiovascular disease. They found that people who scored even a single point higher for positive affect had a 22% lower risk for ...

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The Story of Valentine’s Day’s Origin
"The story of Valentine's Day begins in the third century with an oppressive Roman emperor and a humble Christian Martyr. The emperor was Claudius II. The Christian was Valentinus. Claudius had ordered all Romans to worship twelve gods, and had made it a crime punishable by death to associate with Christians. But Valentinus was dedicated to the ideals of Christ; not even the threat of death could keep him from practicing his beliefs. He was arrested and imprisoned.

During the last weeks of Valentinus's life a remarkable thing happened. Seeing that he was a man of learning, the jailer asked whether his daughter, Julia, might be brought to Valentinus for lessons. She had been blind since birth. Julia was a pretty young girl with a quick mind. Valentinus read stories of Rome's history to her. He described the world of nature to her. He taught her arithmetic and told her about God. She saw the world through his eyes, trusted his wisdom, and found comfort in his quiet strength.

"Valentinus, does God really hear our prayers?" Julia asked one day.
"Yes, my child, He hears each one."
"Do you know what I pray for every morning and every night? I pray that I might see. I want so much to see everything you've told me about!"
"God does what is best for us if we will only believe in Him," Valentinus said.
"Oh, Valentinus, I do believe! I do!" She knelt and grasped his hand.

They sat quietly together, each praying. Suddenly there was a brilliant light in the prison cell. Radiant, Julia screamed, "Valentinus, I can see! I can see!"
"Praise be to God!" Valentinus exclaimed, and he knelt in prayer.

On the eve of his death Valentinus wrote a last note to Julia, urging her to stay close to God. He signed it, "From your Valentine." His sentence was carried out the next day, February 14, 270 A.D., near a gate that was later named Porta Valentini in his memory. He was buried at what is now the Church of Praxedes in Rome. It is said that Julia planted a pink-blossomed almond tree near his grave. Today, the almond tree remains a symbol of abiding love and friendship. On each February 14, Saint Valentine's Day, messages of affection, love, and devotion are exchanged around the world."

Don’t Forget: WGHS’s A-Men performing at 4:30pm on Feb. 15th

ORIGINS OF MARDI GRAS, another holiday that has become popular in the month of February. This celebration dates back just as long as Valentine’s Day. According to historians, Mardi Gras dates back thousands of years to pagan celebrations of spring and fertility, including the raucous Roman festivals of Saturnalia and Lupercalia. When Christianity arrived in Rome, religious leaders decided to incorporate these popular local traditions into the new faith, an easier task than abolishing them altogether. As a result, the excess and debauchery of the Mardi Gras season became a prelude to Lent, the 40 days of penance between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. Along with Christianity, Mardi Gras spread from Rome to other European countries, including France, Germany, Spain and England.

Traditionally, in the days leading up to Lent, merrymakers would binge on all the meat, eggs, milk and cheese that remained in their homes, preparing for several weeks of eating only fish and fasting. In France, the day before Ash Wednesday came to be known as Mardi Gras, or “Fat Tuesday.” The word “carnival,” another common name for the pre-Lenten festivities, may also derive from this vegetarian-unfriendly custom: in Medieval Latin, carnelevarium means to take away or remove meat. Carnivale in Brazil is now one of the largest annual celebrations in the world. New Orleans is the US’s epicenter of Mardi Gras celebrations lasting the six days before Lent. The St. Louis Mardi Gras Parade held annually in Soulard is now the second largest celebration in The United States of America.
Continued from page two... cardiovascular disease. They also found that those with higher positive affect were more likely to be female, less likely to smoke, had lower levels of total cholesterol, and lower levels of hostility and anxiousness, suggesting that a positive attitude contributes to better health overall, according to the study.

Holding Hands Calms Nerves

Holding hands with someone you love has a calming effect on the body, according to a study published in Psychological Science. Researchers recruited happily married couples and placed each woman in an M.R.I. scanner, preparing her to feel a mild shock to the ankle. Of course, the women were anxious. But feeling their husbands’ hands (the husbands reached into the scanners) reduced the women’s brain activity associated with anticipating pain. The study also found that a stranger’s touch provided comfort, but less so than a spouse. High stress and anxiety are linked to high blood pressure, increased heart rate, and other factors that can contribute to heart disease, such as weight gain. In the stresses and worries of everyday life, this research lends new meaning to the phrase “helping hand.” Now you know why community living is so beneficial for so many people. Having that daily friendship and contact with friends and family makes a difference in your overall health. Find your friends and tell them they need to come to The Rockwood and be healthy with you!! 🍼