Heart Foundation

# Every heart



SPRING EDITION

*COVER STORY*
**EATING WELL ON A BUDGET**
Tips for a heart-healthy kitchen

**HEART FAILURE AND FRAILTY**
The link between two complex conditions

A NOTE FROM US



# Our hearts together

**In this edition of Every Heart, we explore how heart disease doesn't always look the way we expect and the simple steps we can all take to recognise risk earlier and protect our heart health.**

From the unique experiences of women whose symptoms are often overlooked, to emerging research that's helping to reshape how we understand risk, this edition highlights the many ways heart disease can be misunderstood, and why awareness matters.

You'll also discover how everyday choices, like the food we eat, play an important role in supporting heart health. These are often the factors we don't think about, yet they can make a meaningful difference over time.

Across Australia, we're continuing to bring these conversations into communities – helping people better understand their risk and feel empowered to take action, whether that's through a Heart Health Check, learning CPR, or making small lifestyle changes.

At the Heart Foundation, we believe that better understanding is the first step towards better outcomes. And thanks to your support, we're working to ensure that more people have the knowledge, tools and confidence to recognise risk earlier and take action for their heart health.

Thank you for being part of this work, and for helping to create an Australia where heart health is achievable for everyone.

**Professor Garry Jennings AO**
Chief Medical Advisor
Heart Foundation

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SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT

# "I wanted to help protect future families"

**After experiencing heart disease from both sides, Gina made a pledge to help others**



**When Gina's husband Ken died suddenly from a heart attack in 2022, her world changed forever. Then, earlier this year, Gina experienced a heart attack of her own.**

Today, she's grateful to still be doing the things she loves – being active at the gym, shopping and feeding her chickens. But living through heart disease from both sides – first as a grieving wife, and then as a survivor herself – gave her a unique perspective.

"It made me think deeply about the future," Gina says. "Ken and I had always talked about what we wanted to leave behind."

Gina wanted to find a way to help protect other families from experiencing the same loss and uncertainty that heart disease had brought into her life. That led her to make the decision to leave a gift in her Will to the Heart Foundation.

> "The people my gift may help in the future may never know my name, and I may never meet them," she says. "But knowing my support could help fund research and improve heart health for others gives me great comfort."

Through her generosity, Gina is helping create a future where more people in Australia can live longer, healthier lives – and helping ensure vital heart health work continues for generations to come.

**Thank you to all our kind supporters for helping to create a healthier future for every heart.**

**Want to discover more about including a gift in your Will?**
**Scan the QR code** or visit heartfoundation.org.au/gifts-in-wills

RESEARCH

# Rethinking the link between heart failure and frailty

A new approach to treating and preventing two closely connected challenges



**Supporting our vision:** Prevent, detect and manage risk early

**You may remember Taiya's story that we shared recently – a young woman living with a rare heart condition, facing heart failure and waiting for a life-saving transplant.**

Her experience shows just how serious heart failure can become. In Australia, almost 144,000 people are living with heart failure, with symptoms and treatment needs that can vary widely.

## What is heart failure?

Heart failure is when the heart muscle doesn't pump blood to the rest of your body the way it should.

It can develop over time due to conditions like heart attacks, high blood pressure, or an inherited heart disease. Some people can manage it with medicine and lifestyle changes, while others may need more complex care, including procedures or, in severe cases, a heart transplant.

## A growing and complex challenge

Heart failure is already a major and growing issue in Australia, particularly as our population ages.

Many people don't just live with heart failure alone. They may also experience physical weakness, memory changes, or difficulty with everyday activities – known as 'frailty'.

Approximately half of all adults living with heart failure are also affected by frailty.

But this is where the picture becomes more complex. Cognitive and physical frailty doesn't just affect people after heart failure develops – it can also be an early warning sign that someone is at greater risk of heart failure in the first place.

These overlapping challenges can make treatment more difficult, increase hospital visits, and affect quality of life. Despite this, care is often focused on the heart in isolation.

## Looking at the whole picture

Associate Professor Quan Huynh is leading research to change this. With your support, he's exploring better ways to treat and prevent heart failure in people facing these overlapping challenges. His research has a two-part approach.

For people already living with heart failure, he's exploring how care can be better tailored for those also experiencing frailty. This includes understanding how well current treatments are working and testing a more personalised care program designed to improve recovery and help people stay well for longer.

At the same time, A/Prof Huynh is also focusing on prevention. By examining how declines in physical strength and cognitive health can increase heart failure risk, he's also working to identify early warning signs and test new ways to support people sooner – before heart failure even develops.

## A more connected way to care

At its heart, this research is about moving beyond a one-size-fits-all model, and towards a more connected, personalised approach to care.

"I have seen firsthand the impact that heart and brain conditions have on people and their families," says A/Prof Huynh. "My goal is to create practical solutions that lead to better care – and help people live longer, healthier lives with fewer complications."

## Creating change together

Research like this is only possible because of supporters like you.

By helping fund work like this, you're supporting better ways to recognise risk earlier, personalise care and improve outcomes for people at every stage of heart failure.



> "I'm incredibly grateful to the supporters who make this work possible. Your generosity allows us to turn new ideas into practical care that can improve people's lives."
>
> *Associate Professor Quan Huynh*

# Addressing the gaps in women's heart care

Women's experience with heart disease can be different, but too often, the warning signs are missed



**Supporting our vision:** Advancing heart health equity



**For chef and former MasterChef contestant Mandy Hall, the first signs of heart disease were easy to dismiss – persistent tiredness and shortness of breath that didn't seem to go away. But when she sought help, she was told it was likely due to anxiety and stress.**

"I kept being told it was stress," Mandy says. "And that I needed to focus on my fitness more."

Trying to push through, Mandy focused on improving her fitness and stress levels – trusting that the explanation she'd been given was right. But the reality was far more serious.

It wasn't until much later and a trip to the emergency department when Mandy received the diagnosis that would save her life: an 85% blockage in a major artery.

Her experience is confronting – but it highlights a bigger issue.

## Why women's heart health needs more attention

Heart disease is one of the leading causes of illness and death for women. Around 20 women in Australia die from coronary heart disease every day.

Yet it is still often misunderstood and under-recognised in women.

Part of the challenge is that heart disease doesn't always look the same for women.

Women may experience different, less "typical" symptoms of heart disease, including fatigue, nausea, shortness of breath, or pain in the jaw, back or shoulder – in addition to the well-known chest pain many people expect.

At the same time, a woman's risk of heart disease can change throughout life, increasing during key stages such as pregnancy and menopause.

These differences can make heart disease harder to recognise, leading to delays in diagnosis and treatment.

Across the health system, there are also persistent gaps in prevention, diagnosis, treatment and outcomes for women.

## The cost of not being heard

For Mandy, one of the hardest parts wasn't just the symptoms – it was the uncertainty.

> "It's pretty frustrating to be told that your symptoms are just the result of anxiety. I knew something was off, but I had to accept what I was being told."

Stories like Mandy's are a powerful reminder that when symptoms aren't recognised early, the consequences can be life-threatening.

But they also show why change is so urgently needed.

## Advocating for change

That's why the Heart Foundation has joined the Australian Government's *Ministerial Expert Panel on Women's Cardiovascular Health* – helping to shape national action to improve heart health outcomes for women.

The panel is focused on addressing gaps across the entire care journey,



20 women die from coronary disease every day in Australia

Women can experience less typical symptoms of heart disease, including fatigue, nausea, shortness of breath, or pain in the jaw, back or shoulder – as well as the well-known chest pain many people expect

Risk can change throughout a woman's life due to hormonal changes, menopause and pregnancy

If you're concerned about your heart health, see your GP for Heart Health Check

from awareness and prevention to earlier diagnosis and better treatment.

It will meet regularly to drive meaningful, system-wide change and ensure that womens' lived experiences are reflected in solutions.

## Closing the gap in women's heart health

For Mandy, the outcome could have been very different.

> "Having your symptoms dismissed as anxiety can lead you to fail to present at times when your life is hanging in the balance – and mine was. Things could have turned out really different for me."

Her story shows why improving women's heart health can't wait.

**Together, we can help ensure more women are heard, diagnosed earlier and given the chance to live longer, healthier lives.**

You can listen to Mandy's full story on the Stories from the Heart podcast. Scan here to listen:

SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT



# Maddy's tribute: every step for mum



When Maddy lost her mum, Coz, to heart disease, life changed forever. Determined to honour her memory, Maddy and her sister Tasma decided to turn their grief into something that could make a difference. Together, they walked 63 kilometres in February to mark what would have been their mum's 63rd birthday, while raising funds for the Heart Foundation.

> "Heart disease isn't just a statistic to us," Maddy says. "It's the reason our world looks completely different now. It's the empty seat, the silence where her voice used to be."

The challenge was built from both love and heartbreak. For Maddy and Tasma, every kilometre was a way to celebrate their mum's life, honour her memory and help other families affected by heart disease.

For Maddy, one of the most powerful parts of the experience was witnessing the generosity of others. Every donation and message was a reminder of just how many lives her mum had touched.

"It wasn't just about the amount," Maddy says. "It was about what it represented: people taking a moment to care, to give, and to stand alongside us in something that was incredibly hard. In the middle of so much grief, that kind of kindness stays with you."

Maddy's story is a beautiful reminder of the difference people can make when they come together for a cause they care about. Thank you to Maddy and all our kind supporters who help make a difference to the lives of so many.

Getting active is one of the best things you can do for your heart. By adding a fundraising goal, you can help improve heart health for even more people. Scan the QR code or visit www.doitforheart.org.au to learn more.

HEART-HEALTHY EATING

# Eating well for your heart on a budget

Every day food choices can help protect your heart, and they don't have to cost you more



**Supporting our vision:** Enabling heart healthy habits

**The food we eat plays an important role in our heart health. Many of the risk factors for heart disease – like high blood pressure and high cholesterol – can be improved through a healthy lifestyle, including the foods we choose every day.**

The good news is that eating well for your heart doesn't have to be complicated – or expensive. With the right approach, you can enjoy healthy, balanced meals that support your heart and help lower your risk, while staying within your budget. These are some simple tips to help you get started.

## SMART SHOPPING STARTS HERE

### *Simple ways to save at the supermarket*

By making a few simple choices at the supermarket, you can prioritise heart-healthy foods while keeping costs down. Even small changes can add up.

- Buy in-season fruit and vegetables – they're often more affordable and fresher
- Choose plant-based proteins like beans, lentils and tofu
- Add frozen and canned vegetables – they're a budget-friendly and healthy option
- Look for home-brand options and compare unit prices
- Buy in bulk for ingredients you use regularly

## BUILD A HEART-HEALTHY KITCHEN

*Stock up on simple, affordable staples*

Once you've stocked up on the right foods, preparing healthy meals at home becomes easier. Having some versatile staples on hand can help you cook more confidently, reduce food waste and avoid last-minute takeaway decisions.

You can start with:

- Canned beans and lentils
- Brown rice, oats and wholemeal pasta
- Tinned fish
- Herbs, spices and healthy oils
- Frozen vegetables

## EAT IN SEASON TO SAVE

*Fresh, affordable ingredients this spring*

Another easy way to reduce your grocery bill is to choose fruit and vegetables that are in season. Not only are they often more affordable, they also taste better and stay fresh for longer.

This spring, look out for:

- **Vegetables:** Asparagus, Cauliflower, Spinach, Zucchini, Spring Onion
- **Fruits:** Lemon, Mandarin, Grapefruit, Avocado, Strawberry

**Tip:** Turn over the page for a heart-healthy recipe that will help you make the most of in-season produce this spring.

## PLAN MEALS AHEAD

*Let us do the planning for you*

Even with the best intentions, deciding what to cook each night can be tricky – especially when you're trying to stay on budget. That's where a little planning can make a big difference.

Planning meals ahead of time can help you shop with purpose, reduce food waste and make healthy eating feel more manageable throughout the week.

To make things easier, the Heart Foundation's **free Heart-Healthy Dinner Plans** help take the guesswork out of healthy eating.

Each plan includes:

- A week's worth of easy, delicious recipes
- Budget-friendly, everyday ingredients
- Helpful tips to support a heart-healthy eating pattern
- Options for different households, including vegetarian meals and meals for two

By following a simple plan, you can save time, reduce stress and feel more confident that you're making choices that support your heart health.

**To learn more, scan the QR code or visit heartfoundation.org.au/heart-healthy-dinner-plans**

**Eating well for your heart doesn't have to be complicated – or expensive.**

**With a little planning, smart shopping and the right tools, small changes can make a big difference for your heart health and your budget.**

## PAUSE & PUZZLE

# Test your nutrition knowledge

1. Which option is usually the most affordable source of protein?
   a) Steak
   b) Lentils
   c) Chicken

2. True or False: Frozen vegetables are less nutritious than fresh.

3. Which of these pantry staples is best for supporting heart health?
   a) White bread
   b) Oats
   c) Sugary cereal

4. True or False: Buying fruit and vegetables in season can help reduce your grocery bill.

5. What's one of the easiest ways to save money on heart-healthy eating?
   a) Buy out-of-season produce
   b) Shop without a list
   c) Plan meals ahead

### Answers:

1. **B:** Plant-based proteins like lentils can be a healthy, filling alternative to meat.
2. **FALSE:** Frozen vegetables are just as healthy as fresh, and can be a convenient, budget-friendly option.
3. **B:** Oats are a versatile wholegrain that contain beta-glucan, which can help lower cholesterol.
4. **TRUE:** Choosing in-season fruit and vegetables can be cheaper.
5. **C:** Meal planning can help you save time, effort and money and supports healthy eating.



HEART-HEALTHY RECIPE

# Green Shakshuka

P.S. This recipe is a keeper. Tear me out and save me for later!

4 serves | 10mins prep | 15mins cook

## Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 500g zucchini (about 3 large), chopped
- 5 green shallots, thinly sliced
- 400g can no added salt chickpeas, drained, rinsed
- ¼ cup basil pesto dip (see tip)
- 100g baby spinach leaves
- 4 eggs
- 1 avocado, quartered
- 60g reduced fat feta cheese, crumbed
- Lemon wedges, to serve
- 4 slices wholegrain sourdough bread, toasted

## Method

**Step 1:** Heat oil in a large frying pan over a medium-high heat. Add zucchini and half the shallots. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 5–7 minutes, until just tender.

**Step 2:** Reduce heat to medium-low. Stir in chickpeas and dip until combined. Stir in spinach. Cook until just wilted.

**Step 3:** Using a large spoon, make 4 hollows in mixture. Crack an egg into each hollow. Cover and cook a further 5–8 minutes, until eggs are cooked to your liking.

**Step 4:** Top with avocado, feta and remaining shallots. Season with pepper. Serve with lemon wedges and sourdough toast.

## Tips

- Shakshuka is a traditional Middle Eastern/North African dish of eggs poached in a spiced vegetable mix.
- Check labels on dips and choose the brand lowest sodium.
- For a change, try replacing chickpeas with no added salt canned cannellini beans or butter beans.

**Check out our full collection of delicious heart-healthy recipes on our website.** They're all designed to be tasty, easily fit into a heart-healthy eating pattern and offer inspiration for cooking meals at home. **Scan here or visit heartfoundation.org.au/recipes**. Enjoy!

Thank you

for helping create an Australia where heart health is achievable for everyone