

A monthly wellness newsletter from Better You

Connections make the heart grow stronger

You eat healthy, exercise, and get annual checkups for a healthy heart. Are you also connecting with people, engaging and investing in relationships? These are your social connections and they can have a big impact on your heart health.

So, what exactly are social connections? These are your relationships with other people, such as friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors. Some relationships may be intimate, or more casual, and they can live close by, or far away. They all matter when it comes to your heart health.

Believe it or not, a lack of social connections is as dangerous to your health as smoking and not exercising. Studies show that these are all risk factors for heart disease and stroke.

For example, a study from Harvard Medical School found that people with deeper social connections tend to recover faster from heart attacks. Likewise, an American Heart Association study suggests that people with close relationships have a much lower risk of heart disease.



Get connected

Now that you know the importance of relationships and heart health, make it a priority to connect with people. Here are some ways to strengthen your connections:

- Sign up for community clubs that interest you
- Get involved with team sports or intramural groups
- Schedule time with friends who share your hobbies
- Join a book club
- Volunteer
- Plan outings within your community

- Phone or video call friends and family members who do not live near you

Making new connections can seem daunting at first, but the benefits can be life changing. Invest in your relationships and improve your heart health along the way!

To learn more about heart health, [click here](#) to join us for a live webinar on Tuesday, February 14, 2023, at 1:00 pm Eastern time.

Resources: www.hsph.harvard.edu; www.americanheart.org

What to expect during the second trimester of pregnancy

You're in the second trimester of your pregnancy with only two more to go. Weeks 14-28 can be an exciting time as your energy increases and your baby continues to grow. If this is your first pregnancy, the unknown can be scary. That's why it's important to understand how you and your baby change during the second trimester. Here's what you can expect:

Your body

- Your belly begins to show.
- You will feel the baby moving.
- You may gain close to a pound a week.
- You could feel hungrier and have heartburn.

- You start to get your energy back.
- The skin on your abdomen and breasts stretches and may lead to stretch marks.

Your baby

- Moves, kicks, sleeps, wakes, and can turn from side to side.
- Can hear and swallow.
- Organs develop further.
- Eyes can start to open and close.
- Grows quickly now until birth.
- By the end of this trimester, the baby is about 12 inches long and weighs a little more than a pound.



The more you know, the better. If you are currently pregnant and have a Florida Blue health plan you are eligible to enroll in the Healthy Addition® Prenatal Education Program. Contact us via email: healthyaddition@floridablue.com or Call: 1-800-955-7635 option 6

Resource: [March of Dimes; American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists \(ACOG\)](#)

Flourless Chocolate Cookies (Serves 16)

Ingredients:

- 1 cup confectioners' sugar
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 2 large egg whites
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ cup bittersweet chocolate chips or chunks, chopped

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Line 2 large baking sheets with

parchment paper. Coat the paper with cooking spray.

Combine confectioners' sugar, cocoa powder and salt in a medium bowl. Beat egg whites in a large mixing bowl with an electric mixer until soft peaks form. Add vanilla. Fold in the cocoa powder mixture with a rubber spatula until combined. Fold in chocolate chips (or chunks).

Drop the batter by tablespoonfuls



onto the prepared baking sheets, leaving about 2 inches between each cookie. Bake, one sheet at a time, until the cookies are just beginning to crack on top, 12 to 14 minutes. Let cool slightly on the pan before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely.

Recipe courtesy of Eatingwell.com; for nutritional information click [here](#).

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