

## Heart Healthy Italian Caprese Avocado Toast



**Ingredients:**

- 1 pint cherry tomatoes (halved)
- 1/4 cup basil, finely sliced, plus more garnish if desired
- 4 slices whole-grain or whole wheat bread (toasted)
- 1 avocado, halved and pitted
- 1/8 tsp ground Black pepper
- 1/4 cup fat-free, shredded or sliced mozzarella
- 2 tsp balsamic vinegar

**Preparation:**

- Halve each cherry tomato and finely slice the basil leaves.
- Toast each piece of bread.
- Slice the avocado in half and remove the pit. Use a spoon to remove the avocado's flesh from the skin and place it into a bowl. Add the chopped basil and pepper. Mash together with a fork.
- Divide avocado mixture between each toast piece, spreading a layer onto each one. Place each toast onto a plate.
- Add tomatoes onto the avocado. There may not be space for all the tomatoes, depending on how large the bread is.
- Divide mozzarella between each toast and drizzle with balsamic vinegar. Garnish with a few basil leaves, if desired.
- Serve.

**Calories:** 188 Per Serving

**Protein:** 8.0g Per Serving

**Fiber:** 6.5g Per Serving

**Cooking Tip:** If you prefer a gooey, cheesy toast, place under the broiler for 1 to 2 minutes for the mozzarella to melt.

**Keep it Healthy:** Other ideas for a flavorful avocado toast include a Mexican-flavored topping of corn, lime and jalapeno or an Asian-inspired one of sliced cucumber and sesame seeds.

This newsletter is published quarterly and provides information and resources for caregivers and older adults. Information and comments are welcomed and should be sent to, [Lori.Mayer@Genesishcc.com](mailto:Lori.Mayer@Genesishcc.com). You may also contact Lori Mayer at 610-925-4138.

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# Genesis Today

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## American Heart Month: How the Heart Changes With Age



On average, your heart beats 115,000 times each day, pumping 2,000 gallons of blood through your veins and arteries. That's hard work, so you want to make sure you do all you can to keep your heart healthy.

For millions of Americans, however, heart disease is a distressing reality. In fact, heart-related problems comprise the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States. That's why, each year, the American Heart Association designates February as American Heart Month. It's a time for spreading the word about cardiovascular disease and how to prevent it.

**Risk increases with age.**

Heart disease is of particular concern to people age 65 and older. Aging can cause changes in the heart and the blood vessels that feed it, which could put you at greater risk.

- While your resting heart rate doesn't change significantly with aging, your heart can't beat as fast during physical activity as it did when you were younger. This can put a strain on the heart.
- Over the years, fatty deposits can build up on the walls of arteries. Dietary changes can help to slow this down.

- Hardening of the arteries, a condition known as arteriosclerosis, also occurs with age. This can lead to high blood pressure.

Together, these factors increase the odds of suffering a heart attack, stroke, coronary heart disease, and heart failure as you age.

But there is good news: Heart disease can often be prevented. For many people, it's simply a matter of making healthy choices and managing medical conditions. American Heart Month is a time to commit to making small changes that lead to better heart health. In this edition of *Genesis Today*, you'll find suggestions for improving your overall health and wellness. Be sure to see your doctor regularly and talk to him or her about how to lower your risk of heart disease.

For more information on coronary heart disease, visit the American Heart Association's website at <http://www.heart.org>.

## caregivers' corner

**The Benefits of Showing Gratitude**

It's been said that gratitude is the healthiest of all human emotions. In fact, studies have shown that displaying kindness and gratitude to the people around us can have a positive impact on our wellness and our lives.

For instance, showing gratitude can bring:

- **Emotional benefits**, including feeling more optimistic, focusing on happier memories, and being less depressed.
- **Social benefits**, such as being friendlier and more likeable, and eliciting kindness from others in return.
- **Health benefits**, including improved sleep, more energy, and lower blood pressure.

In a sense, showing gratitude can have a cumulative effect. The more you express gratitude for what you have, the more reasons you'll discover to be thankful. Here are some ways that caregivers and loved ones can work together to make the practice of gratitude a daily habit:

**Keep a gratitude journal.** Each day write down and share with others something good that happened, or something for which you are grateful. A fun option to this would be to create a "gratitude collage," cutting out magazine pictures of favorite or appealing things and places.

**Write a thank-you note.** At least once a month, write a letter expressing your appreciation to someone who has had an impact on your life. Send it in the mail, or deliver it — and read it aloud — in person.

**Take a "mindful" walk together.** While walking, point out beautiful or interesting sights around you — such as a flower or cloud formation — and express how and why you should appreciate them.

**Practice meditation or thoughtful reflection.** From time to time, take a trip down memory lane, focusing only on positive memories and the people, places, and events for which you will always be grateful.

Once you get into the habit of practicing gratitude, it becomes part of day-to-day life. It helps you connect to something greater than yourself — other people, nature, or the world at large. Ultimately, life can be more meaningful when you continually practice an "attitude of gratitude."

# Genesis

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### Feeling Good All Over: Enhancing Your Total Wellness

#### “How are you feeling?”

When asked that question, most people would respond with an answer that reflects their physical health. When you consider overall wellness, however, the way you “feel” is much more multi-faceted.

Wellness is a holistic philosophy that promotes a healthier body, mind, and spirit. Research on aging has shown that elderly people can experience significant benefits when they embrace wellness as part of their everyday lives. That’s because a feeling of wellness leads to greater happiness and a deeper sense of fulfillment.

How does one achieve total wellness? Here’s a look at the key dimensions of wellness that should regularly be nurtured:

**Physical.** It’s no secret that being active and eating a nutritious diet can help to keep your body healthy and fit. Strive for 30 minutes of physical activity each day for five days a week and plan meals with a focus on nutrition.

**Intellectual.** Keeping your mind active is just as important as keeping your body moving. To engage your brain, pursue activities like reading, art classes, and volunteer work.

**Emotional.** This dimension encourages you to connect with your feelings, adapt to life’s changes, and find strength in difficult times. Be honest about your fears and frustrations, and seek the emotional support of family, friends, and staff members.

Wellness is an active process through which people become aware of, and make choices toward, a more successful existence.  
- The National Institute of Wellness (NIW)

**Social.** Interacting with the people around you can help you ward off problems like loneliness and depression. In senior living facilities, there is no shortage of opportunities for social activities. Take part in them as much as possible.

**Occupational.** This aspect of wellness applies even to those who are no longer in the working world. It’s primarily about feeling productive and useful. Share your wisdom and talents with others, and you’ll find yourself feeling empowered.

**Spiritual.** Nurturing your spirit does not have to mean practicing a religion. You can connect with a “higher power” through activities like gardening, meditation, journaling, and yoga. The objective is to find hope, strength, and inner peace.

All told, wellness is an active process that requires time and commitment. While achieving wellness is wise for anyone at any age, it is especially meaningful for the elderly. When you find ways to nurture the many aspects of your being, you’re taking steps toward living a longer, more rewarding life.

## Cold Hands, Warm Heart? How Winter Weather Affects Cardiovascular Health

Ah, winter...it conjures images of landscapes freshly dusted with snowfall, and cozying up by a warm fire. Before you venture outside, however, make sure you’re prepared; winter can take its toll on your cardiovascular and circulatory systems. In fact, there is a 31 percent increase in heart attacks in the coldest months of the year compared to the warmest.

A variety of factors can contribute to the likelihood of experiencing heart problems in the winter. Cold weather decreases the supply of oxygen-rich blood to the heart and causes blood vessels to contract. Therefore, your heart has to work harder as it demands more oxygen-rich blood and your body attempts to maintain its core temperature. This strain can create the conditions for a heart attack to occur.

The flu can also put you at risk. Fever raises the heart rate and dehydration can also be dangerous. In the winter months, make sure you wash your hands regularly, stay hydrated, and get your flu shot. If you do suspect you have the flu, go to your doctor early to get antiviral medication.

Here are some helpful tips to stay warm and keep your heart healthy during the coldest months of the year.

- Dress in layers**  
Keep your head and hands covered. Accessorize with gloves, scarves and hats. Wear moisture-wicking fabrics to avoid overheating. Remove layers if you get too hot or start to sweat. Wear warm socks and slippers indoors.
- Stay active**  
It’s easy to want to hibernate during the winter, just cozying up on the couch. But it is very important to stay active, to get your blood flowing and keep you warm. Make it a point to get up and move at least once every hour. While watching a television show, get up from your seat during the commercials, stretch and walk around a bit.
- Have warming foods and drinks**  
Warm yourself from the inside out with hot tea, hot chocolate, or coffee. Choose warming soups, stews

and porridges for your meals. Turning on the oven and stove to prepare dinner will have dual benefits: A tasty, home-cooked meal and a bit of extra heat for your living space.

**Keep your home heated**  
Make sure your heat system is working properly and that there are no drafts. Use thermal curtains and rugs to keep your home cozy, and take advantage of the sun. Open the blinds during the day to let the sun warm up your room and close them in the evening. Running a humidifier can also help keep your home warmer and moisten the harsh, dry winter air.

While the colder months create a perfect storm of risk factors for heart attacks, doing all you can to stay active and warm will help to keep your heart healthy.



### Get Active! Discover the latest fitness trends for older adults

- Yoga.** This has become the most popular form of exercise for older adults. With good reason: It helps with arthritis, flexibility, blood pressure, and stress.
- Walking clubs.** This is a great way to combine exercising and socializing. Walking has many benefits, including improved circulation and heart function.
- Balance classes.** Falls are a leading cause of injury among the elderly. Learning exercises to improve balance can reduce the risk of falling.
- Water-based exercise.** Working out in the water — swimming, pool walking, and water aerobics — can build strength with less strain on the joints.

**Tai-Chi.** This is a type of exercise that combines graceful movements with meditation. It helps improve circulation, balance, blood pressure, and relaxation.

For those who are tech-savvy, “wearable technology” is a rapidly growing trend. Many older adults now use Smart Watches and fitness trackers to monitor heart rates and how many steps they take each day.

It’s important to remember that any amount of exercise is better than none. Once you find the type of activity you enjoy, you’ll look forward to exercising on a regular basis. And of course, you’ll feel better, too! A word to the wise: Be sure to consult your doctor before starting any exercise regimen.

### Heart Healthy Snack Choices

Small, everyday choices can have a big impact on lowering the risk of heart disease. Along with exercise, diet is incredibly important — but it’s easy to be tempted by snacks that could adversely affect your heart health. Get in the habit of swapping your favorite snack foods for healthier choices that are just as satisfying.

**Salty Swaps**  
Craving a salty, crunchy snack like chips? Most chips contain unhealthy fats as well as carbohydrates that can spike your blood sugar. Reach for a handful of nuts instead. They’re full of healthy, unsaturated fats.

In addition, you can also try seeded crackers with whole grains, instead of white flour crackers. Pair these with hummus instead of heavy, dairy-based

dips. Whole grain snacks are full of fiber that your body will take longer to digest, leaving you feeling full for longer.

Need something more substantial? Make a quesadilla with a whole-wheat tortilla and low-fat cheese. Add pico de gallo or salsa for extra kick, and skip the sour cream. Choosing whole grains instead of refined carbohydrates can lower your LDL, or “bad” cholesterol. And instead of using full-fat mayonnaise, substitute mashed avocado or Greek yogurt.

**Sweet Switches**  
How do you satisfy that urge for candy? A bowl of grapes should do the trick. Put them in the freezer first — that will make them taste sweeter! You can also substitute baked goods that contain white flour,

butter, and sugar with dark chocolate. You’ll still be indulging, but taking in healthy antioxidants and less sugar.

For your beverage, choose flavored sparkling water instead of soda. You’ll get all the bubbles with none of the sugar. Or if you need an energy boost, choose green tea, which is packed with antioxidants and contains a calming substance called L-theanine. You’ll get a sustained energy jolt from the caffeine, without the jitters or the sugar crash.

The key is to cut back on “empty calories” — in other words, foods with little to no nutritional value. By making smart swaps with your snack foods, you can keep your heart healthy and your stomach satisfied.