Follow your heart. Give your heart. Break a heart. In all these sentiments, one probably imagines that familiar symbol rounded at the shoulders and pointed at the end.

It wasn't always that way. In the western world, for nearly 1,500 years, the physical heart was considered to be shaped more like a pinecone. That was thanks to second-century Greek physician Galen, who evidently never looked at a real one. Since Galen believed it, so did everyone else, according to Marilyn Yalom, Clayman Institute scholar.

But in the 1300s, the modern shape of the symbolic heart began to take form, preparing the way for real knowledge of the physical heart.

In the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, the theological virtue of charity is depicted in work dated to 1305 as a woman holding a pear-shaped heart to God. By 1340, that heart shape changed. In a French manuscript of that year, the symbolic heart was depicted in the modern form we recognize today.

Perhaps that was a good time for the symbolic heart to detour from the physical one. By the 1500s, Flemish physician Andreas Vesalius and Leonardo da Vinci overcame centuries of taboo against studying the dead human body and were able to describe the actual, physical heart.

Meanwhile, in symbolism, the stylized heart we recognize today became the standard. It has been used ubiquitously in items as diverse as Martin Luther's personal seal in the late 1400s to Milton Glazer's famous 1976 logo: I (Heart) NY.

According to data from 12 separate clinical trials, today's heart-failure patients are much less likely to die from sudden cardiac arrest.

In fact, sudden death from heart failure has declined by almost 50 percent in the last 20 years, according to Dr. John McMurray, the University of Glasgow cardiology professor in Scotland who organized the trials.

Vigorous combinations of powerful heart medications have turned the tide, according to McMurray. Patients can experience substantial recovery from their heart dysfunction.

Heart failure occurs when the heart is unable to pump enough blood to meet the body's needs. In most cases, patients have developed reduced ejection fraction, a condition in which the heart's lower chambers cannot squeeze hard enough to pump oxygen-rich blood through the body.

To prevent ejection fraction, many heart failure patients receive an Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillator (ICD), a device that monitors heart rhythm and delivers an electrical shock to restore normal rhythm when the heartbeat starts to go astray.

According to the New England Journal of Medicine, the study's data also showed that sudden death rates have decreased by 44 percent in patients who have not received an ICD.

Observers say outcomes depend in large part on a patient's faithfulness in taking prescribed medications.

Modern Medications Rally Heart Patients

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Tech advances will steer heart care

The future of cardiovascular care will be steered by artificial intelligence and wearable mobile devices, according to articles published in The Journal of the American College of Cardiology.

Every stage of patient care will be enhanced by artificial intelligence, according to Joel Dudley, director of the Next Generation Healthcare Institute at Mount Sinai. AI will steer research, diagnosis and selection of therapy, he said. The next step will bring technologies to a clinical setting.

In areas of patient health improvement and health-care delivery, digital health applies information to produce solutions. These technologies have the potential to streamline research while saving money; however, delays in their implementation are often the result of concerns regarding data quality and patient safety.

Meanwhile, wearable mobile devices will continue to help manage heart problems. It takes a personal commitment to a heart-healthy lifestyle of diet and exercise, medication, and self-monitoring to manage heart health. It is here the use of mobile devices and wearables have made 24-hour health monitoring a reality for so many--especially those with atrial fibrillation, a heart rhythm disorder.

The authors targeted AFib, in particular, which is hard to detect and difficult to manage. Office visits and short-term monitoring only provide limited information on the presence of the disease, but mobile health -- called mHealth -- will offer a more complete picture that can help prevent strokes, control symptoms, and reduce hospitalizations.

Loneliness can pose a significant threat to aging people with heart disease, especially those who live by themselves.

In fact, research shows that elderly men and women living alone -- with no one to talk to -- are far more vulnerable to severe cardiovascular perils.

According to The Annals of Behavioral Medicine, humans are hardwired to rely on secure social surroundings. Without human association, they feel vulnerable and become hypervigilant about their safety. This hypervigilance alters sleep and body functioning, and increases the chance of death.

In July 2018, a study presented at the European Society of Cardiology's annual nursing congress reported on nearly 13,500 Dutch patients living with heart disease, heart failure, or arrhythmia (abnormal rhythm).

Researchers had discovered that regardless of a patient's heart condition, age, education, and degree of smoking, loneliness was a factor in the more harmful results. In fact, patients who said they had no one to talk to in times of need had nearly twice the risk of death. Patients with little or no social support were three times as likely to express symptoms of anxiety, depression, and significantly lower quality of life.

Beat the winter blues with meditation

For many of us, the natural tendency during winter is to seek comfort food and hibernation. Shorter days and less sunlight can also bum us out a little (if it's more than a little, talk to your doctor, as conditions like Seasonal Affective Disorder are a real thing.)

One great way to fend off the winter blues is with meditation. Meditation has been proven to lower blood pressure, aid in concentration, help you get better sleep, and help with general wellbeing.

A November 2018 article in the New York Times even made the case that meditation might help you stay more active in the colder months.

And it's easy to get started. Meditation doesn't need to involve complicated chants or rituals, but can be as simple as setting a timer for five minutes, closing your eyes, and paying attention to your breath.

Find a comfortable spot to sit upright and keep your back straight, with your legs crossed if possible. Rest your hands on your knees, palms up. Close your eyes and breathe in for a count of four; hold it for a count of four; release for a count of four; and hold for a count of four. Repeat.

You can also ditch the counting and just breathe in and out like you normally do, and concentrate on your breathing. Don't worry if it feels like your brain isn't "clear" or blank. This is normal. You'll have all kinds of thoughts pass through, and the trick is to take note of them and let them pass.

That's all there is to it. You can keep things that simple or find meditation groups to learn more techniques. Whatever your preference, try adding it to your routine and see how it benefits you.
Addictive game ages gracefully

2019 marks the 35th anniversary of one of the most iconic and addictive video games: Tetris.

The game, in which players race to fit geometric puzzle pieces together as they fall from the top of the screen, was developed in 1984 by a Russian software engineer named Alexey Pajitnov.

Pajitnov was programming computer games that tested the capabilities of new equipment developed by the USSR, according to tetris.com, and in his spare time he decided to create a computer game, inspired by his favorite puzzle board game, Pentominos.

Pajitnov called his game Tetris, which is a combination of tetra, the Greek word meaning four -- each of the puzzle pieces is made up of four squares -- and tennis, his favorite sport. The puzzle pieces in the game are called Tetriminos.

It took a few years for the game to assume the popularity it now enjoys. In 1985, it quickly spread throughout the Soviet Union when it was ported to an IBM PC, according to a story in Business Insider, and then was distributed to PCs in North America and Europe.

When the game became available on Nintendo's handheld Game Boy, however, it truly took off, selling more than 35 million copies.

According to the 2014 Business Insider story, Tetris has become one of the top-selling video games of all time, having been translated into more than 50 languages. Tetris is played in more than 185 countries. It's sold more than 170 million copies.

Across
1. "___ Misbehavin'"
5. Keep out
8. Jewish month
9. Distinctive flair
11. Raise, as an anchor
12. "The __ Ranger"
13. Most wary
15. Cable channel
16. Supplied with fluid
21. Diamond Head locale
22. Hilo feast
24. Agenda
25. Blunders
26. Antlered animal
27. Overdo the TLC

Down
1. "I see!"
2. False god
3. Church part
4. Spot for carved initials
5. Disparaged
6. Hand cream ingredient
7. Namesakes of Bert Bobbsey's twin
10. After expenses
14. Genetic material
16. Short flight
17. Bush's alma
18. Indian lentil dish
19. Continental currency
20. Feathered missile
23. "It's no ___!"

The headline is a clue to the answer in the diagonal.
NATIONAL HEART VALVE AWARENESS DAY - FEB. 22, 2019

This February 22, and throughout the year, Mended Hearts is proud to participate in the National Heart Valve Disease Awareness Day campaign. The campaign encourages you to ‘Listen to Your Heart’, know your risk factors, get your heart checked regularly, and join the movement to help spread the word and raise awareness.

Millions of Americans have heart valve disease and every year, an estimated 25,000 people in the U.S. die from heart valve disease. When valve damage reduces blood flow, the heart has to work harder and the body gets less oxygen—leading to a number of symptoms. However, people with valve disease do not always have symptoms, even if their disease is severe.

For these people, a heart murmur is the most important clue. Others may have symptoms with less severe disease. The only way to really know is to be diagnosed by a doctor, so see yours right away if you are told you have a murmur or you are experiencing any of these:

- Shortness of breath
- Weakness or dizziness
- Pain, tightness, or discomfort in the chest
- Fainting or feeling faint
- Fatigue
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat
- Lightheadedness
- Decrease in exercise capacity
- Swollen abdomen or ankles and feet

Many of these symptoms will only happen during activity, but as the disease gets worse they may also happen while resting.

The good news is that most heart valve disease cases can be successfully treated with valve repair or replacement in patients of all ages. Unfortunately, awareness of heart valve disease is alarmingly low, with close to half of respondents to a national survey reporting that they have not heard of heart valve disease. To learn more, or to find out how you can participate in raising awareness, go to www.ValveDiseaseDay.org.

Mended Hearts/Mended Little Hearts Election Information

Voting for the Mended Hearts and Mended Little Hearts 2019-2021 Board of Directors is now open and runs through February 28, 2019 at 11:59 PM ET.

We recently hosted three “Meet the Candidates” webinars. If you are interested in viewing those webinars, please email Andrea at Andrea.Baer@mendedhearts.org and she will email you the registration links.

This year ALL votes will be cast online; chapter officers, group coordinators and members-at-large were emailed a link to vote along with detailed instructions, but if you did not receive that link, or you have questions about the election, please email Andrea.

Candidate bios and photos were in the Nov/Dec issue of Heartbeat and can be found online at https://mendedhearts.org/Heartbeat/Heartbeat122018.html

Slow-Cooker Tangy Tomato Brisket

15 oz. canned, no-salt-added tomato sauce
1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
1 Tbsp. no-calorie sweetener, granulated, 1 1/2 packets
1 tsp. paprika
1 tsp. garlic powder
1/2 tsp. black pepper
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. cayenne pepper for spice, optional
1 small white onion (finely diced)
1 lb. sirloin beef roast or steaks, all visible fat discarded

1. In slow cooker, combine tomato sauce, vinegar, no-calorie sweetener, paprika, garlic powder, black pepper, salt, cayenne (if desired), and onion. Stir gently.
2. Add sirloin making sure it is submerged in the barbecue sauce mixture.
Cook on low setting for 8 hours. Slice and serve with a drizzle of the sauce.

*Recipe found on https://recipes.heart.org/en/recipes/slow-cooker-tangy-tomato-brisket

Mended Hearts—1500 Dawson Road, Albany, GA 31707