



HAPPY HEART MONTH

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While we should always think about protecting our hearts, February is the month to remind us of how important factors like diet, exercise, stress, sleep, and smoking play in the health of our heart.

DID YOU KNOW THAT **1 IN 4 DEATHS** IS CAUSED BY HEART DISEASE??

While you can't change certain risk factors like age, genetics, race, and gender, there are a number of actions you can take to help prevent heart disease:

- 1. Don't smoke cigarettes!!!** Just don't do it. Avoid second hand smoke too!
- 2.** Exercise daily and get those walking steps in.
- 3.** Eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, plant based protein, lean animal proteins & less foods high in sugar, saturated fat, sodium and trans fat.
- 4.** If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation: no more than 1 drink per day for women and 2 drinks per day for men.
- 5.** Keep your stress in check. Practice self-care.
- 6.** If you have diabetes, control your blood sugar levels.
- 7.** If you have high blood pressure, reduce sodium and get those numbers down.
- 8.** If you have high cholesterol, improve your levels.
- 9.** Make an appointment with a Registered Dietitian to help you live a healthier lifestyle!



ANYONE INTERESTED IN A LITTLE CHOCOLATE?

If that list above has you feeling down, let me lift your spirits with some dessert! **Peanut Butter, Banana and Dark Chocolate Frozen Truffles** to be exact. Since February is also the month of Valentine's Day, it would just be wrong if we didn't have a little bit of chocolate!

With only a few ingredients that are all real, whole foods, this dessert is healthy and good for your heart!

Dark chocolate, natural peanut butter and bananas. The small amount of oil is in there to make the dipping process easier. I've made these truffles without the oil, but the whole dipping process gets really messy and clumpy without it. I prefer to use a neutral tasting oil that also contains mostly heart healthy monounsaturated fats such as avocado oil. It's also one of my favorite oils to cook with because of its high smoke point of 500 degrees F.

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THE BENEFITS OF THESE TRUFFLE INGREDIENTS:

PEANUT BUTTER contains heart healthy fat, antioxidants and even protein and fiber. There's a lot of junk food peanut butters on the market, so be sure to buy a natural style product that doesn't contain added sugar or salt. Look at the ingredients on the label. There should be ONE ingredient in your peanut butter. You guessed it: **PEANUTS!**



Not only do **BANANAS** taste amazing, but they are great as part of a diet to normalize blood pressure. Of course bananas are known for containing potassium, which is very important in blood pressure control, but they're also loaded with other nutrients including vitamin B6, folate, magnesium, fiber and antioxidants.



And of course there's CHOCOLATE. Glorious, wonderful chocolate. Did you know that chocolate is heart healthy? It may help to lower bad cholesterol and reduce your risk for heart disease, may improve blood flow to the brain, and contains powerful anti-inflammatory antioxidants. That doesn't mean you can eat all you want, but a little bit of dark chocolate goes a long way! A 2015 study published in Heart journal reported that those who eat up to 100 grams (3.5 ounces, or 1/4 cup chocolate chips) per day, may have a lower risk of developing heart disease and stroke. If you can handle dark chocolate with at least 70% cacao, that's the way to go. If that's a little too bitter for you, drop down to something about 65%, but try to go as high as possible.



<https://heart.bmj.com/content/101/16/1279>



PEANUT BUTTER BANANA & DARK CHOCOLATE FROZEN TRUFFLES

Recipe by Lindsey Pine, USC Hospitality Registered Dietitian | **Makes 20-24 truffles**

INGREDIENTS

- 2 large bananas, peeled (about 8 ounces without the peel)
- 1/3 cup natural peanut butter, crunchy or smooth
- 1-1/4 cups dark chocolate chips (preferably with a cocoa % of at least 65%)
- 2 teaspoons avocado oil, or other neutral tasting oil

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Slice the bananas and place on a parchment or silicone baking mat lined sheet pan. Place pan in the freezer and allow bananas to freeze for about 1 hour.
2. In the bowl of a food processor, add the frozen banana slices and peanut butter. Process until mixture is smooth. You will probably need to scrape the bowl multiple times before the mixture fully comes together.
3. Spoon banana mixture into a bowl and place in the freezer until mixture is firm, about 1-1/2 to 2 hours.
4. Remove banana mixture from the freezer. If mixture is too firm to scoop, allow to thaw for about 10 minutes. Using a scoop or melon baller with a 1" diameter, scoop out balls of banana mixture and place back on the lined sheet pan. If this gets a little messy, form balls the best you can with your fingers. Place sheet pan in freezer until balls are frozen, about 15 minutes.
5. Right before you're ready to remove the banana balls from the freezer, place the chocolate chips and oil in a microwave safe bowl. Microwave in 20 second increments until the chocolate is melted. Stir chocolate chips after each round. It shouldn't take you more than a few rounds in the microwave.
6. Place a banana ball on a fork and dip into the bowl of chocolate. Use a spoon to pour chocolate over the top.
7. Put truffles back on the lined sheet pan and place in freezer until chocolate is hardened, about 5 minutes. Place truffles in an airtight container and store in the freezer until ready to eat.
8. When ready to eat, allow truffles to thaw for 5 minutes.

