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JANET BOND BRILL Hoping Americans Take Her Message to Heart

By Juliann Schaeffer

With February being American Heart Month, what better brain to pick for how to keep our hearts happily ticking than noted cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevention expert Janet Bond Brill, PhD, RD, LDN, CSSD, who dedicates much of her time to educating the masses on what it means to have a healthy heart.

Brill's extensive knowledge base covers many general nutrition topics, as she holds master's degrees in both nutrition and exercise physiology as well as a doctorate in exercise physiology, though she long ago determined (from fairly unfortunate circumstances) that heart health was destined to be her niche in the nutrition field.

"Cardiovascular disease has devastated my family," she recounts, remembering how the disease has affected many of those closest to her. "My father died of heart disease, my brother from kidney disease related to hypertension, my

grandmother from a stroke, and my husband and father-in-law both have coronary artery disease and are MI [myocardial infarction] survivors."

Yet through that pain came the realization that those lives lost didn't have to be in vain since CVD often can be prevented, and nutrition can play such an integral role. "I believe CVD can be prevented, treated, and even reversed with proper nutrition and heart-healthy lifestyle changes," Brill says. "I've made it my life's work to send this message to all who will listen so that perhaps ... I can keep them from suffering my family's same fate." So began her work to spread the word.

Thus far, Brill has written two books: *Cholesterol Down* and *Prevent a Second Heart Attack*. She has a third on the way and has spoken her heart-healthy mantra to countless audiences through her blog, the national media, and various speaking engagements. However, if you ask her, this mission is no mere job but a greater passion she seeks to share: "I love my job with all my heart. Health, fitness, and nutrition have always been a passion of mine. To share this passion with others is a gift, not a job."

Today's Dietitian (TD): In your opinion, what are the top five characteristics that are pivotal to being successful in the nutrition industry and why?

Brill: First and foremost, nutrition professionals must love what they do. This characteristic is crucial for success to do what you are, meaning walk the walk and don't just talk the talk. The public will clearly respond favorably to those who are passionate about their line of work.

The second and third characteristics are hard work and perseverance. Nothing great is achieved in life without tremendous personal sacrifice, investing in yourself—education, education, education—and a rock-hard work ethic.

The fourth characteristic for success in the nutrition industry is the willingness to not be the nutritionist for everyone but for a select few. In other words, have good business sense and find that small niche of expertise where you can truly stand out and shine among the sea of your colleagues.

And lastly, have the courage to step outside your comfort zone and remember to have patience, as building a name for yourself takes time, even decades.

TD: You've written two books on heart health. What is the third one that's on the way?

Brill: *Blood Pressure Down: The 10-Step Plan to Lower Your Blood Pressure in 4 Weeks — Without Prescription Drugs* will be available in May wherever books are sold.

TD: If you could offer clients only one piece of advice, what would it be?

Brill: The No. 1 cause of human death in this country and the world is largely preventable through healthful lifestyle

choices. Start today to live a heart-healthy lifestyle so you'll be here tomorrow.

TD: As a speaker and spokesperson, you promote and teach the basics of living healthfully daily to thousands of people. What's the best piece of advice for living healthfully that you've learned along the way?

Brill: Think mostly plants when choosing what goes into your mouth. I learned this years ago when I did an internship at the Pritikin Longevity Center in Miami Beach, Florida.

TD: What five items are always in your refrigerator/cupboard?

Brill: Light soymilk, quick-cooking steel-cut oatmeal, ground flaxseeds, bananas, and spinach.

TD: Best healthful snacks for nutrition professionals who travel often?

Brill: On an airplane or the road: fresh fruit, nuts, and my trusty whole grain peanut butter-and-banana sandwich. I also grab sushi in the airport, a fat-free yogurt, and occasionally hard-boiled eggs—prepeeled, and yes, I toss the yolks.

At hotels: I always carry brown paper lunch bags filled with popcorn kernels and pop my own popcorn in the hotel, and I carry "flax packs," which are small sealed single servings of ground flaxseeds, for my oatmeal.

When all else fails, I'll order a veggie pizza—very light on the cheese, extra veggies—for dinner on the road.

TD: Favorite heart-healthy dessert recipe?

Brill: I like my flourless dark chocolate brownie recipe with walnuts (see recipe) from *Prevent a Second Heart Attack*.

TD: Most unusual food you can't live without?

Brill: I know this will surprise many of the "purist" dietitians out there, but I must have my Splenda packets! I eat about three packets (with fiber) a day and am perfectly fine with the safety record. For me, it tastes good and helps me curb my calories and my sweet tooth, plus it enables me to cut back on my added sugar intake.

TD: Best tip for staying active throughout the winter months?

Brill: Join an indoor gym and find something you like to do (swim laps or jog around an indoor track). When the snow falls, take up snowshoeing—one of my all-time favorite sports.

TD: You've completed four marathons and countless races—what are your go-to running essentials for a long-distance run?

Brill: No. 1 is a training companion. Joining a running club or finding a friend to train with is most important. Then you need good running shoes and a set schedule, written out on a calendar, so you can check off each training run as you get closer to your goal.

Dr Janet's Flourless Dark Chocolate Brownies With Walnuts

Serves 16

A dark, moist chocolaty treat

Ingredients

One 15-oz can black beans, drained and rinsed
¾ cup packed Splenda Brown Sugar Blend
½ cup quick-cooking oats
¼ cup unsweetened dark cocoa powder
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 T espresso powder
2 T ground flax seed
1 tsp vanilla extract
¼ tsp salt
½ cup chopped walnuts

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray a 9-inch baking pan with nonstick cooking spray. Place black beans in a mixing bowl. Add the sugar, oats, cocoa powder, olive oil, espresso powder, flax seed, vanilla, and salt.

2. With an electric mixer blend the ingredients until the black beans are mashed up and the mixture is smooth, about two minutes. Scrape batter into the prepared pan, top with walnuts, and bake for 30 to 35 minutes until the edges pull away from the sides of the pan and the middle of the brownies is firm. Let cool before slicing into 16 pieces.

Nutrient Analysis per serving (1 brownie)

Calories: 140; Fat: 6 g (0 g EPA, 0 g DHA, 1 g ALA);
Sat fat: 1 g; Cholesterol: 1 mg; Sodium: 89 mg;
Carbohydrate: 16 g; Dietary fiber: 2 g; Sugars: < 1 g;
Protein: 3 g

— RECIPE USED WITH PERMISSION FROM *PREVENT A SECOND HEART ATTACK* BY JANET BOND BRILL ©2/2011

TD: What is one wish you have for how people will celebrate/acknowledge American Heart Month?

Brill: Most Americans equate the month of February with love. I hope people will celebrate and acknowledge this month of love by caring for themselves first and their loved ones by making an effort to take care of your and your loved ones' hearts—there's no greater gift of love and compassion.

— Juliann Schaeffer is a freelance writer and editor based in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and a frequent contributor to *Today's Dietitian*.