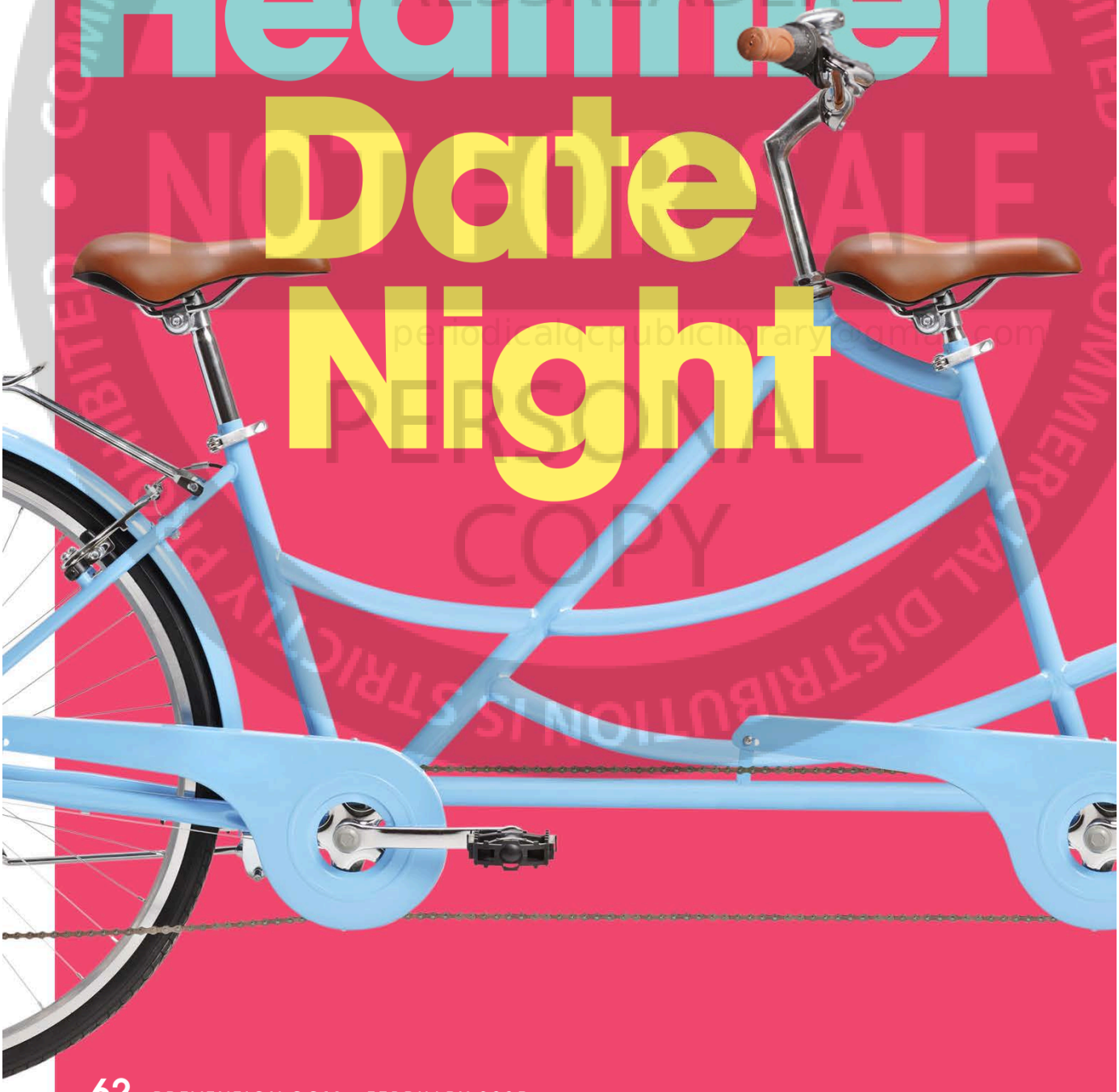
- Dating (Social customs)

HEALTH

Have a Healthier Date Night



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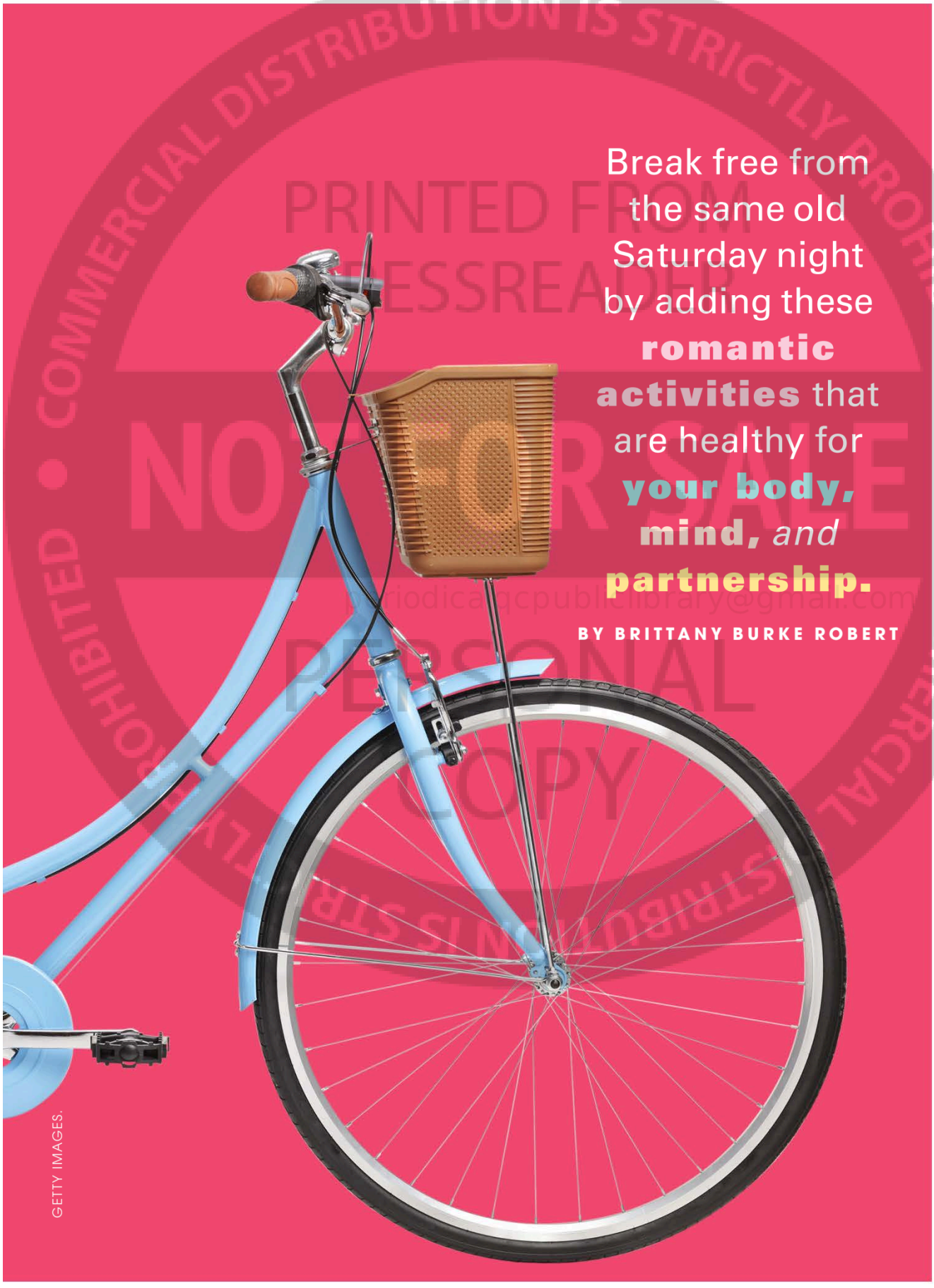

Break free from the same old Saturday night by adding these **romantic activities** that are healthy for **your body, mind,** *and* **partnership.**

BY BRITTANY BURKE ROBERT

GETTY IMAGES.

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As much as you adore hanging with your partner,

spending every date night with Netflix and takeout can leave you feeling bored and a little physically blah as you begin to blend in with your sofa. "Human beings need novelty to thrive," says Jacqueline Olds, M.D., an associate professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and the coauthor of *Marriage in Motion*. "Putting in the work to create it by doing new things with your partner can benefit you as a couple."

Intrigued by the idea of stepping up your dating game but not sure where to start? We've got you. Here are eight fun and easy ways to connect with

JOHANNA PARKIN.

each other while boosting your health and bringing new energy to your relationship. Put one—or all—on your calendar!

INSTEAD OF EATING AT THE SAME OLD BISTRO...

try a progressive dinner date

If you live in an area with a lot of cafés within a few blocks, park your car and walk to one restaurant for a drink and an appetizer, then to another interesting spot for your entrées. Take a stroll around the neighborhood, then check out a cute diner or ice cream spot for dessert. This will not only give you lots of choices and a change of scenery but also add a dose of movement between courses. A recent study found that walking could help increase metabolism, boost energy levels, reduce cholesterol, and improve mood. Bonus: Walking after eating will aid digestion, giving your body a chance to catch up with all those courses. Just make sure you wear comfortable shoes.

INSTEAD OF PLAYING A BOARD GAME...

team up to conquer an escape room

If you bond with your partner over games, jigsaw puzzles, or murder mysteries, push it up a notch by getting into the game, literally: Inside a themed room or series of rooms, you'll work together to figure out puzzles or word games and put together hidden clues so as to "escape" before your time is up. This brain-buzzing activity will keep you on your feet, get your adrenaline flowing, and push you to stretch your cognitive abilities by introducing you to novel challenges. Search online for an escape room near you.

INSTEAD OF LOUNGING ON THE COUCH...

bust a new move

Schedule a date night at a country-western club or a swing dance class—or simply go dancing and try some new moves. Learning choreography, even if it's just a few steps to the left and a jump to the right, builds coordination skills, and studies have shown that dancing can help lower dementia risk and support cognitive health. "Dancing also builds adrenaline, which can transfer to your relationship, fueling passion, excitement, and attraction. This helps you grow and strengthen your bond," says Rosie Shrout, Ph.D., an assistant professor of human development and family science and the director of the Relationships & Health Lab at Purdue University.

INSTEAD OF GOING FOR A DRIVE...

explore your town on bikes

For a new way to look at the streets you travel every day, take a bike tour

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of your area, exploring landmarks you typically ignore and stopping at an outdoor café along the way to rest, refuel yourselves, and chat about memories of those spots or cool things you've seen. Cycling can lower the risk of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes and improve well-being and quality of life. "Exercising together can improve your mood—while you're exercising and afterward—as well as your relationship satisfaction," says relationship scientist Rachel Vanderbilt, Ph.D.

INSTEAD OF VIEWING THE GAME ON TV OR AT A BAR...

head to a real live game

Whether you try to catch foul balls at a minor league baseball game, root for your local high school football team, or even just help fill the stands at a friend's kid's gymnastics meet, cheering on athletes at a live event has proven health benefits. A recent study showed that people who attended live sporting events had higher levels of life satisfaction, which researchers connected with healthy aging and lower mortality rates. (Just don't overdo it on the hot dogs and beer!)

INSTEAD OF GETTING TAKEOUT...

plant a garden of tasty delights

This nature-based date can play out over several weeks. Start by planning a daytime date at your local garden center, where you can wander through the greenery and choose the most delicious-looking plants for a small herb garden in your backyard, on a balcony, or even on a kitchen windowsill. Then, once you've grown enough basil, rosemary, mint, thyme, or cilantro, pick out a healthy herb-filled recipe to cook together. You get the multiple benefits of being in nature (including stress reduction and improved sleep), and cooking with herbs can help fight inflammation as well as lower your cholesterol and glucose levels and improve your cognition and mood.

INSTEAD OF WATCHING A MOVIE...

plan your next vacation together

Research shows that people are happier when they have a vacation to look forward to, so spend a date night getting your next trip on the books. Start by listing all the places you each dream of visiting, then talk through where and when you'll realistically be able to travel in the next year based on your budget and schedules. Add the dates to your calendar and start looking into hotels, museums, and restaurants together. "Planning these activities adds excitement and feelings of closeness and connection, which are vital to both the relationship and each partner's health and well-being," says Shrout. Beyond getting the benefits of anticipating a trip, you'll be prior-

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itizing your future wellness: People who take vacations have a decreased risk of cardiovascular conditions, fewer symptoms of depression, and lower stress levels.

INSTEAD OF GOING TO A CONCERT...

embrace the beauty of silence

Make a date to engage in quiet mindfulness—a recent study in *The Journal of the American Heart Association* found that a meditation practice significantly reduced blood pressure in participants with hypertension. Start by doing a yoga session, then search YouTube for a gratitude meditation to listen to together. Sit facing each other in a comfortable position on the floor, press Play, and let the good vibes flow. Make a point of exchanging compliments and each saying what you love most about the other. Who knows where that closeness will lead?

KYLE BEAN.