



but to be shared."

"Love is in your heart not to stay,

The time of roses and chocolate are upon us—Valentine's Day is just a few days away! Perhaps you'd like some heart healthy ideas on what you can do for your friends and loved ones this year. Flowers are always appropriate and appreciated by both genders! They can brighten the spirit and serve as a visible reminder of your love and care. And here are a few others to think about: chocolate, tea, red wine, or maybe a special homemade heart healthy candlelight dinner?? Read below on the health benefits of these offerings!

Chocolate? Who says everything that tastes good is bad for your health? Chocolate is made from cacao beans which are fermented and processed. The less processing that occurs, the more healthy flavonols are retained in the cocoa. The healthier dark chocolate has a high cocoa content (60-70%) Some brands you might recognize are Dove, Hershey's Extra Dark, Endangered Species Chocolate Company (found in health stores) and Cocoa Via available at Walgreen's. Flavonols exhibit antioxidant activity that helps prevent or delay damage to cells and tissues caused by free radicals. These flavonols also play a role in maintaining healthy blood pressure, promote healthy blood flow and support healthy blood vessels. As yummy as chocolate is, it's high in fat and calories. That means you need to limit your portion. Just a little over an ounce contains about 200 calories, 10 grams of fat and 15 grams of sugar! If you choose to indulge, try cutting back elsewhere on your calories (but don't cut out the healthy foods your body really needs!)

There are other heart healthy foods that contain polyphenols that would also fit in with Valentine's Day! Tea is a calorie-free way to benefit your health! Which teas are best? All teas contain flavonols but green tea has the most of these beneficial compounds as it is the least processed. Herbal teas do not as they do not contain the leaves from the *Camellia sinensis* (tea) plant. Read more about the health benefits of tea at <http://www.healthcastle.com/tea.shtml>.

How about red wine? Perhaps you have heard of its heart benefits. Yes, it does contain the flavonoids mentioned above but be sure to read what the American Heart Association recommends on this issue. <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4422>
There are many other health concerns associated with alcohol consumption. Plus, knowing that we can find flavonoids in other foods that offer additional nutrients (which alcohol does not) is something important to consider.

And how about that candlelight dinner? You know if you prepare it at home you can choose the ingredients yourself and also control the portions. This is one difficulty with dining out. You don't know exactly what is in the food or how it is prepared and the portions are usually way too large. (A doggy bag has become a must do!) Kraft has some yummy sounding easy recipes on their website such as baked Salmon with Tomatoes, Spinach and Mushrooms, Strip Steak with Onion Wine Sauce and Chicken Marsala. There are also ideas for appetizers, salads and desserts. How about something as simple as strawberries dipped in melted dark chocolate for dessert? Heart healthy and delicious! Be sure to check the nutrition information provided for the recipes as you plan your menu! Better Homes and Gardens has several suggestions including an Herb-Stuffed

Pork Tenderloin.

<http://ww4.bhg.com/bhg/story.jhtml;jsessionid=OHT0AQN343HH3QFIBQNSAOQ?storyid=/templatedata/bhg/story/data/14569.xml&catref=SC1680> But what could be easier than one of the pre-marinated Hormel very lean pork tenderloins found in your supermarket meat case? They are tasty and easy and you may have enough left for another meal! The Busy Cook's website has menu ideas that include traditional, crock pot and five ingredient recipes for those who need a quick meal after work! <http://busycooks.about.com/cs/seasonalcooking/a/Valentinesmenu.htm> . The All recipes website gives some menu ideas and five fabulous aphrodisiac foods which turn out to be healthy as well! Check them out at

<http://allrecipes.com/advice/coll/entertain/features/valentinesday.asp>

With any of the menus you can include a salad with spinach and dark greens and added veggies. Be sure to include some red veggies like radishes, red peppers, tomatoes! Go easy on the dressing! How about an easy homemade pizza made in the shape of a heart? Try a whole wheat crust (recipe attached), use lots of veggies (don't forget the red ones!) and go easy on the cheese! Whatever you choose to prepare, don't forget the candles and the romantic music and enjoy!

Right now they are predicting almost 40 degrees on Valentine's Day. What could be more romantic and heart healthy than a walk together (how about in the moonlight? Sure take the dog along, too!) Keep up a brisk pace and enjoy that special time together as you both do something that benefits your health!

Enjoy your weekend and your Valentine's Day!

Sally

Sally Barclay, MS RD LD
Nutrition Clinic for Employee Wellness
Iowa State University
133 MacKay Hall
Ames, IA 50011
(515) 294-9625
barclay@iastate.edu