



Help Your Heart

With a Smart Valentine's Day Treat

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By Jill West, RDN

February is a heart-filled month. In addition to Valentine's Day, there is American Heart Month, Women's Heart Health Day and National Wear Red Day on Feb. 6. These are important awareness campaigns because heart disease kills an estimated 630,000 Americans each year, and there is a misconception that they are mostly men. However, heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women.

The goal of American Heart Month is to increase awareness about the many ways to prevent heart disease. National Wear Red Day brings attention to the fact that this is a woman's disease, too, and encourages Americans to live a heart-healthy life by exercising at least 30 minutes each day and eating a diet that is rich in fruits and vegetables and low in sodium, trans fat and saturated fat. Although there is some controversy regarding the role of saturated fat, the guidelines continue to support choosing mostly vegetable oils, nuts, seeds and avocado and limiting sources of saturated fat (whole-fat dairy, butter and animal fats).

Just as we begin to recover from the excess sugar and fat from the winter holidays, along comes Valentine's Day. Candy, chocolate, cupcakes, school parties and decadent restaurant meals can easily rack up extra calories, sugar and fat. But these strategies will help you balance holiday fun with heart-healthy eating.

- **Think fruit.** Valentine's Day typically revolves around sweets. By making fruit a primary component of any desserts, you increase nutrients while lowering the fat, calories and added sugar. For example, order a fruit basket or fruit bouquet for your loved one, or buy chocolate-dipped strawberries instead of the box of chocolates. For family desserts, try angel food cake topped with fresh strawberries and raspberries, light whipped cream and a drizzle of chocolate. Or offer a yogurt parfait made with layers of vanilla yogurt, strawberries and raspberries, then topped with chopped almonds and chocolate chips.
- **Choose a heart-healthy meal.** For a romantic dinner, order fish or chicken stir-fried, roasted, baked or grilled instead of fried. Choose vegetable side dishes, such as salad with dressing on the side or grilled vegetables. Another option is to order one entrée and dessert to share. Many restaurant servings are enough for two.
- **Take it slow.** If you are given a luxurious box of chocolates, limit the number of pieces you eat at one time by sharing with others. Store the remainder out of sight by putting them in the back of a cupboard, in the refrigerator or in the freezer to enjoy in moderation over several weeks.



■ **Support healthy classroom celebrations.** Instead of frosted cookies, cupcakes, chips and soda, I suggest contributing fruit kebabs, fruit salad or chocolate zucchini mini-muffins (see recipe). You can also gather some parent volunteers, talk to your child's teacher and suggest a party activity. Students can make their own fruit kebabs (skewers, apple chunks, strawberries, pineapple, grapes) or yogurt parfaits. Other options include dipping strawberries and red apples into fruited yogurt or using cookie cutters to make heart-shaped sandwiches. Kids love hands-on activities.

■ **Get moving.** Be sure to get 30 to 60 minutes of activity. Although it won't offset all the calories from a dinner out or extra sweets, every bit of calorie burning helps and supports getting back on track.

■ **Join the Health eHeart Study.** This online study is being conducted by UCSF researchers and can be completed at your convenience and in small segments. By participating, you help doctors, nurses, researchers and others in the medical community learn more about what causes heart disease and how to predict it, prevent it and treat it. What a great way to celebrate American Heart Month and Valentine's Day! For more information, go to www.health-eheartstudy.org or call 415-514-3278

Jill West, RDN, is an accomplished speaker and author of 400 MOMS: Discover What 400 Nutrition Experts Feed Their Kids. As a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist and Certified Health Coach with a private practice in Lafayette, she has worked with thousands of individuals and families helping them make healthy lifestyle changes that are practical and realistic for the whole family. Jill lives in the East Bay with her husband and three boys. For more information, visit www.400MOMS.com

Chocolate Zucchini Mini-Muffins

Although these muffins look decadent, they are much healthier than most chocolate desserts because cocoa powder is low in fat. The unhealthy fat in chocolate comes from cocoa butter, while these muffins have heart-healthy vegetable oil, in addition to zucchini and applesauce to make them moist.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 eggs
- ¾ cup sugar
- 1/3 cup applesauce
- ¼ cup canola oil
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1 cup shredded zucchini
- ½ cup unbleached bread flour
- ¾ cup whole-wheat flour
- ¼ cup cocoa powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground allspice

PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

In a large bowl, beat eggs, sugar, applesauce, oil and vanilla until well blended. Stir in zucchini.

In a separate bowl, combine flours, cocoa powder, salt, baking soda, baking powder, cinnamon and allspice.

Gradually add dry mixture to egg mixture until blended.

Line mini-muffin tin with paper cups. Fill ¾ full with batter.

Bake for 12-15 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean.

Cool on wire rack.

Top with a candy heart, dollop of whipped cream or a slice of strawberry decoration, as desired.

Makes 36 mini-muffins