



Indulge in chocolate, red wine, and these other heart-healthy tips for Valentine's Day



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Valentine's Day is approaching, and with it comes hearts. Heart chocolates, heart decorations, heart greeting cards, hearts everywhere! But there is one heart more important than all the others to think about this Valentine's Day: your own. When we think of Valentine's Day, we think of romance, not heart-health, but the two are not mutually exclusive. There are plenty of ways to have a romantic, fun, and heart-healthy Valentine's Day.

Celebrate with heart-healthy Valentine's foods

One of the best ways to protect your heart is by eating plenty of heart-healthy foods and avoiding over-consuming options that are less healthy.

"In recent history, fats have received a bad reputation, but we now know that omega-3 fatty acids are considered to be cardioprotective, while trans fats contribute to coronary artery disease," says [Soma Mandal](#), MD, a board-certified internist at Summit Medical Group in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey. "I strongly recommend eating one or two servings of a fatty fish during the week."

Heart-healthy foods come from a wide-variety of sources. "A number of foods types—whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, and nuts—have been linked to lower risk of heart disease, so a healthy diet should include these types of foods regularly, preferably daily," says [Glenn Gaesser, Ph.D.](#), professor in the College of Health Solutions at Arizona State University.

Eating for heart-health also means [limiting foods that are not heart-friendly](#). These include:

- Saturated fat
- Trans fats
- Lots of added sugar
- High sodium
- Processed meats
- Alcohol in excess (more than one drink per day)

There are lots of ways to incorporate heart-healthy foods into your Valentine’s Day celebrations.

1. Surprise your sweetheart (or treat yourself!) with a heart-healthy breakfast in bed

“Leafy greens, tomatoes, avocados, and whole wheat bread make spinach- and tomato-topped avocado toast a heart-healthy powerhouse,” Gaesser says.

Or choose to go for a heart-healthy breakfast disguised as Valentine’s Day decadence such as a [raspberry-mango breakfast parfait](#).

2. Heat things up in the kitchen

Turn food into fun by cooking together with your loved one.

- Try out some new [heart-healthy recipes](#) like [fish tacos with broccoli slaw](#).
- Recreate the iconic scene from Lady and the Tramp with [whole wheat spaghetti, marinara, and turkey meatballs](#).
- Incorporate [healthy cooking choices](#) into your Valentine’s Day feast.

3. Turn Valentine’s Day health into a romantic treat for two

Try a [heart-healthy take](#) on a Valentine’s Day classic, like chocolate-dipped strawberries and red wine.

“Dark chocolate and red wine are a great timely choice, as dark chocolate has been shown to have beneficial effects on vasculature health, and moderate alcohol consumption (approximately 1 glass of wine per day) has also been linked to heart health,” explains Gaesser. “Strawberries are also full of heart-friendly vitamins and minerals, plus fiber, so dipping some in dark chocolate is another great Valentine’s Day pick.”

Incorporate heart-healthy activities

Physical activity is important for [a healthy heart](#). Adults need at least [two and a half hours of moderate aerobic activity](#) each week.

Nothing says this exercise needs to be boring. Physical activity comes in many forms outside of a gym—it can even be a way to connect with your partner on Valentine’s Day.

Some fun and romantic ways to get active this Valentine’s Day include:

- Taking a walk or hike
- Going skating

- Going for a bike ride
- Dancing together (or having a dance party for one!)
- Going sledding
- Popping on a vintage aerobics video and giggling while you work out (paging Richard Simmons!)
- Challenging each other to a one-on-one sport like ping pong or shooting hoops

Before beginning a new exercise routine or trying a new physical activity:

- Verify with your healthcare provider that the activity is safe for you.
- Start slow and build up to more. If you are not currently physically active, don't jump into intense exercise. Even a few minutes of exercise is helpful, and you can gradually work up to more strenuous activity and for a longer duration.

A caution for Valentine's Day 2021: Make sure your heart-healthy Valentine's Day activities also follow protocols for COVID-19 prevention. Catching a contagious virus is not heart-healthy or romantic.

What about sex?

Good news—[sex counts as aerobic activity](#)! In addition to exercise, sex can help lower stress, improve sleep, and create social connections that can lower the feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression associated with a higher risk of heart disease.

Sex is great, but is it safe? People with heart disease or at risk of developing heart disease often worry that having sex could put a dangerous strain on their heart. Fortunately, [sex rarely causes harm](#) for people with controlled [heart disease](#), because it is usually for a short duration.

Before raising your heart rate between the sheets, if you have or are at risk for cardiovascular disease:

- Check with your healthcare provider to make sure your heart is able to handle sex
- Discuss medications related to sex, such as birth control or [erectile dysfunction](#) medication like [Viagra](#), with your healthcare provider
- Avoid sex if you have symptoms like chest pain, shortness of breath, indigestion or an irregular heartbeat until you speak with your health care provider.

Exchange heart-healthy gifts

Instead of candy or flowers, give the gift of heart-health to your loved one with presents such as:

- Sports and exercise equipment
- Fitness monitors, such as a FitBit or an Apple watch

- Subscriptions to fitness and nutrition apps or publications
- A carefully curated personalized music playlist to dance or exercise to
- Heart-healthy recipe books
- A membership to an online fitness program
- A heart-healthy cooking class
- A plan for making heart-healthy lifestyle changes for yourself, such as quitting smoking, eating healthier, and getting enough exercise. A healthy you is the best gift of all.

Valentine's Day fun and Valentine's Day health go well together. This year, use heart-healthy options to make your Valentine's Day romantic, enjoyable, and fit.