

# The York University Staff Association Health and Wellness News and Views

This February millions of us will have romantic Valentine's Day plans filled foods that are not good for our hearts. Followed by heart shaped candies, balloons and boxes filled with chocolates. Since you can't turn a corner in February without seeing a heart, heart health advocacy organizations have added to the history of Valentine's Day by designating the month of love "heart health month" and making it another reminder of how important it is that we protect and cherish both our loved ones and our hearts.

Nine out of 10 Canadians over the age of 20 have at least one risk factor for heart disease and stroke. High blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, smoking, stress, physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and being overweight or obese increase the risk of having heart problems. Well your sweetheart may have the key to your heart... a proper diet and regular physical activity can be the key to a healthy heart for years to come.



Valentine's Day is a time for love, laughter, fun and food. Don't completely deprive yourself. Having a small slice of cake or a few of your favourite chocolates will not lead to weight gain. Moderation is the key. Choose dark chocolate, rich in flavonoids that prevent the buildup of coronary arterial plaque, which can contribute to the development of heart disease. Look for products that have at least 60 percent cocoa and list cocoa beans or cocoa liquor as the first ingredient.

**Think red.** Researchers have found that the anthocyanins in cherries reduce the inflammation and lower cholesterol. Strawberries are juicy heart shaped treats that are a potent source of antioxidants. Why not dip these delectable berries into dark chocolate for an extra special treat your loved ones will be sure to enjoy. In addition, a glass of red wine is believed to help reduce the risk of blood clots and keep the cardiovascular system in shape.

Express yourself! Emotional and mental health are equally as important as physical health. Learning how to express your emotions is not only good for your relationship but it can improve your overall health. The brain also needs to be exercised to stay healthy. Sharing your feelings and communicating them effectively works those brain muscles, helping to keep them alert and healthy. In addition, expressing your emotions will help reduce stress and maintain a healthy emotional balance, which will have a positive effect on your relationship with others. This Valentine's Day, instead of browsing through cards trying to find the right words, write your own Valentine's Day sentiment or poem.

Who says your Valentine's Day has to include dinner and a show? This year skip the theatre and try something more adventurous with your partner. Think outside the heart shaped box and plan an outdoor date. Go for a moonlit run. Try ice skating or skiing. Go on a hike together that ends in an intimate picnic. Don't like the outdoors? Take your partner to a yoga class, or challenge your loved one to a game of mini putt. Anything to get the blood flowing and the heart pumping.

Eating antioxidant-rich foods may also increase your chances of having a more intimate evening. Consider heart healthy foods when planning your Valentines Day dinner. The omega-3s in fatty fish avocados and almonds are great for improving circulation in your body. They can also raise dopamine (feel-good) levels in the brain—a major precursor to romance.

Regardless of how you choose to spend your Valentine's Day, be sure not to overdo it. Your loved ones will not measure your love for them by the amount of money you spend or the extra stress you place on yourself in hopes of creating the perfect day. Keeping things FUN, yet simple, is your ticket to a stress free Valentine's Day that will leave you both healthy and happy.

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