

Have a Heart-healthy Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day traditions – boxes of chocolate and lavish dinners – aren't exactly good for your heart, or your waistline. This February 14th, show that special someone you love him or her in a way that's a little healthier. Here are some suggestions:

If you're giving chocolate, go with dark chocolate. No doubt about it, chocolate is the Valentine's Day gift of choice – and if you go with the dark variety, it can also be a healthy treat. Dark chocolate contains flavonoids, which have been shown to be good for the heart. Look for dark chocolate treats that contain at least 60 percent cocoa to get the most health benefits. Don't go overboard, though – dark chocolate packs just as much fat and calories as the milky kind.

If you're drinking alcohol, pick red wine. Red wine contains antioxidants called polyphenols and a compound called resveratrol that protects the heart and may have other health benefits as well. However, alcohol use is also linked to an increased risk of cancer. The American Cancer Society recommends you limit yourself to no more than 1 drink per day for women and 2 drinks per day for men, if you drink at all.

Make a romantic meal at home. If you eat in, you'll have more control over calories, fat, and portion size. For dessert, serve fruit such as strawberries dipped in dark chocolate (see recipe in this issue) or poached pears drizzled with chocolate.

If you do go out, keep these tips in mind. Save on fat and calories by ordering an appetizer, splitting an entrée, or sharing a meal with your sweetie. Ask waiters if the cooks can use lighter preparations: grill the chicken, steam the vegetables, or bring sauces and salad dressings on the side.

Rethink date night. Instead of dinner and a movie, consider a date that involves being active or exercising together. Enjoy romantic vistas on a hike, or pair up on the ice skating rink.

The American Cancer Society can help you learn more ways to stay well and reduce your risk for cancer – visit cancer.org/GreatAmericans or call 1-800-227-2345 for more information.