

## This Valentine's Day, Consider Giving Hugs Instead of Kisses

While many see this upcoming holiday as an opportunity to give their sweetheart a sweet treat, the American Heart Association (AHA) favors giving a more heart healthy gift. February is National Heart Month and the AHA wants the average American to take a break from their love affair with sugar.

Under new recommendations the AHA advises women to eat no more than six teaspoons every day in added sugars, and men eat no more than 10 teaspoons. If Americans followed the guidelines, the average person would cut their added sugar consumption by more than 70 percent.

Soft drinks are the number one source of added sugars. The term "added sugars" includes any non-natural sugar in our food including the copious amounts of extra sugar now commonly found in processed foods such as cereals, muffins, or even sauces for meat.

All of these extra calories from added sugars are contributing to the obesity epidemic, which in turn leads to an upward trend in heart disease. The AHA estimates modern day sugar consumption adds an extra 76 calories each day over what the average person consumed in 1970. Sugars have been implicated in obesity, high blood pressure, and inflammation which are risk factors for heart disease. Heart disease and stroke kills one in every 3.7 men, and one in every 2.4 women.

"Sugar is considered a 'triple threat' - it provides extra calories, no nutrients, and it may displace other foods and nutrients in the diet that are more beneficial," said Dr. Donald D. Hensrud, an associate professor of Preventive Medicine and Nutrition at the Mayo Clinic.

So let's think about heart healthy gift alternatives. Give the gift of an activity which you could do with your loved one, i.e. a hike in a beautiful park, a group bowling event, or even making a nutritious and romantic dinner for two. Make sure the "gift" includes an activity where connecting and communicating with your sweetheart – two things that promote both emotional and physical health is essential. Loneliness is one of the major triggers for illness, while building a strong social support system can boost your immune system and promote heart health.

According to Dr. Dean Ornish, author of six best-selling books on reversing heart disease, other heart healthy tips include:

- 1) improving your nutrition by increasing your intake of plant-based whole foods
- 2) adding exercise to your routine which includes both aerobic and strength training
- 3) avoiding and managing stress by learning to utilize methods such as meditation, yoga, and relaxation techniques.

So be extra sweet to your sweetheart this Valentine's Day and skip the sweets – your heart will thank you for it.

**For additional information, please contact a Personal Health Partner  
at 800-327-7272.**

  
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