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A Valentine's Day dinner that's good for your heart

By Stacey Stein

Valentine's Day is often associated with a candle-lit dinner at a romantic restaurant, feasting on calorie-laden foods, indulging in a decadent dessert, and washing all of it down with a bottle of wine. But while this type of Valentine's Day celebration may satisfy the taste buds, our waistlines can end up suffering.

"Portions tend to be much larger at restaurants than what we might eat at home," says registered dietitian Shannon Crocker. "If someone is trying to maintain a healthier weight, one of the first things I tell them is to eat out less because (restaurant) foods are higher in sugar, fat or salt."

With this in mind, show your loved one they've captured your heart by preparing a healthy, homemade meal that's actually good for the heart.

Read on for ideas on how to prepare a homemade Valentine's Day dinner that incorporates heart-healthy ingredients without compromising on taste. You can expect to impress your loved one, earning a heartfelt thank you at the end of the meal.

Mouth-watering mains

These sizzling fajitas (<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/dinner/sizzling-mexican-fajitas>) are loaded with veggies, including red peppers, green peppers and onions. "These have a lot of vitamin C, which is important for heart health," says Crocker, who recommends doubling up on the vegetables. Crocker also suggests using an extra old cheddar cheese – this will give the fajitas a flavour boost while allowing you to use less cheese, helping cut back on calories.

Alternate idea:

Nothing says Valentine's Day like a heaping bowl of pasta and this linguini with chicken in a pomodoro sauce (<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/dinner/pomodoro-sauce-with-chicken-and-linguine>) not only fits the bill, it's also chock-full of good-for-you ingredients. This light dish includes six cups of tomatoes, which are brimming with fibre, folate, potassium and vitamin C, nutrients that are all important for heart health. Crocker suggests using a whole grain linguini – this will give you a boost of fibre, which is good for the heart and also helps keep you feeling full.

Amazing apps

If you're making the fajitas for your main, this layered tex mex dip (<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/appetizers/layered-tex-mex-dip>) works nicely as an app. It uses Nordica Smooth Plain, which is low in fat and high in protein. "This will be satisfying and help keep

you full longer," says Crocker, adding that the dip is also full of heart-healthy veggies such as tomatoes, peppers, olives, garlic and green onions. Crocker recommends pairing the dip with baked whole grain pita chips.

Alternate ideas:

According to Crocker, shrimp might increase levels of 'good cholesterol,' which would make it beneficial for supporting heart health. Shrimp is also low in calories and is an excellent source of selenium, an antioxidant that protects cells from damage. With this in mind, Crocker recommends serving jumbo shrimp canapés with chili lime cream

(<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/appetizers/jumbo-shrimp-canapes-with-chili-lime-cream>) with the fajitas as an alternative to the tex mex dip. Crocker also suggests swapping either Nordica Smooth Plain or low-fat sour cream for the whipped cream to lighten up the dish.

If you're making the linguini dish for your main, this zucchini bruschetta

(<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/appetizers/zucchini-bruschetta-with-canadian-swiss-cheese>) goes well with pasta. Crocker recommends using a whole wheat baguette to bump up the fibre.

Delicious desserts

You can opt to go simple with chocolate-dipped strawberries, or strawberries with light whipped cream. Strawberries have soluble fibre, antioxidants and vitamin C, so they are great for heart health, Crocker points out. If you're looking for a dessert with a hint of indulgence, this berry cheesecake parfait (<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/desserts/smooth-berry-cheesecake-parfait>) will do nicely.

Alternate ideas:

If you want a more decadent finish to your meal, you can try making these cannoli cones

(<https://www.gaylea.com/recipes/desserts/instant-cannoli-cones>), a great finale to an Italian meal. This is an indulgent dessert, so Crocker advises having a smaller portion, or reducing the amount of sugar by either substituting Nordica Smooth Plain for vanilla bean or skipping the icing sugar if using the vanilla bean flavour.

Divine drinks

Wine or champagne might be obvious go-to beverages for a Valentine's Day dinner, but too much alcohol isn't waistline-friendly. An alternative idea is to mix rosé with sparkling water to make a spritzer – top with some raspberries for a pretty-looking drink.

Alternate idea:

Crocker suggests finishing off the meal with a green tea latte (bonus: green tea is jam-packed with antioxidants, which help protect the heart.) Simply steep some green tea bags in steamed milk and enjoy!