

## Give Your Valentine the Gift of a Healthy Heart

By Kyle Swift

This year, Americans will spend approximately \$2 billion on candy gifts for the special Valentines in their lives. That's good news for the chocolate industry; however, if you're looking for a non-traditional Valentine gift for someone you love, consider giving the gift of a healthier heart.

While we've made much progress in diagnosing, preventing and treating heart disease over the past three decades, it is still the leading cause of death by far – responsible for more deaths than all forms of cancer combined. The greatest accomplishment in this area has almost certainly been the acknowledgement that women are at equal risk to men for heart disease, while their symptoms may be significantly different. With millions of adult men and women living with heart disease, and millions more living with the risk factors that precede heart disease, here are some things you can focus on this Valentine's Day to help protect your heart – and the heart of your sweetheart.

- ***Evaluate and address metabolic syndrome.*** This is a group of health risks — large waist size, elevated blood pressure, glucose intolerance, low HDL cholesterol, and high triglycerides — that dramatically increases your chance of developing heart disease. But metabolic syndrome is reversible, and your doctor can help you determine your ideal numbers. **Ideal Valentine's Day gifts: tandem bike; healthy cooking classes; beginners' yoga DVD.**
- ***Address diabetes head-on.*** Diabetes increases the risk of heart disease in women even more than it does in men. Although women usually develop heart disease about 10 years later than men, diabetes erases that advantage. Type II diabetes is highly treatable, and in some cases even reversible. Work with your doctor to prevent or manage the condition and add years to your life. **Ideal Valentine's Day gifts: fresh strawberries; gift cards for smoothies; personal blood glucose monitor.**
- ***Stop smoking.*** Smoking remains one of the greatest independent risks for heart attack and stroke in both sexes, but women who smoke are twice as likely to have a heart attack as male smokers. **Ideal Valentine's Day gifts: quit smoking together; ask your doctor for an appropriate "stop smoking aid" if either of you struggle to quit.**
- ***Get moving.*** We've all heard it – "sitting is the new smoking." Even if you work out for an hour a few days each week, sitting more than 6 hours a day increases your risk of heart disease almost as much as smoking. **Ideal Valentine's Day gifts: standing work desk; mini stair stepper; activity band or pedometer; high quality running shoes.**
- ***Chill out together.*** The dangers of chronic stress, overwork and sleep deprivation cannot be overestimated in terms of their impact on your heart health. Americans' lives are notoriously busy and stress-filled, so use Valentine's Day to focus on happiness and relaxation. **Ideal Valentine's Day gifts: couples' spa day; weekend vacation (or staycation); local meditation or yoga classes.**

- **Get peace of mind.** If you have risk factors, symptoms or a family history of heart disease, invest in appropriate diagnostic testing to ensure your risk is managed. Work with your doctor to determine which testing is best for you. **Ideal Valentine's Day gifts: scheduled visit with a cardiologist, EKG, cardiac stress test, C-reactive protein, cardiac calcium scoring test.**

I also want to remind you that Woodland Heights Medical Center's 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Women in Red Luncheon will be Thursday, April 27. For more information on this event, call (936) 637-8688.

The greatest gift you can give your loved one is the gift of health, strength and long life. So instead of flowers, get creative this Valentine's Day. If you need assistance finding a physician partner to help you diagnose or manage heart disease, call (936) 699-CARE or visit [WoodlandHeights.net](http://WoodlandHeights.net).

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