

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

FAX: 932-5261

February 14, 2008

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.  
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776  
e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu**Eat Reds for Valentine's Day!**

If you didn't remember to get your significant others something special today, there's still a little time! If you have, then sit back, relax and take good care of your own heart. Less stress is definitely does the body good. So do reds and pinks. Red and pink foods that is, and I don't mean bright red boxes of chocolates!

What other reds? Think tomatoes in all their forms, from big slicing tomatoes to tiny grape or cherry tomatoes, from spaghetti sauce to sun dried tomatoes, tomato juice to catsup. They should take you a week or two to eat your way through. Then add on red peppers, sweet or hot. Red onions, red beets and red cabbage, definitely! Purple egg plants work too. Red beans, kidney beans, pink beans, azuki beans - fiber and protein! Bright red apples and pale pink grapefruit, red grapes, scarlet strawberries and crimson cherries, watermelon, cranberries, plums, blackberries, raspberries, pink guavas, pomegranate and passion fruit, how many more fruits could you ask for?

What do they all have in common? Those lovely red colors. And why should you be eating them? Because the pigments that produce those red colors are also very healthy. Most of them are in the chemical group called anthocyanins. Some are betalins. Guess what plant that comes from - beets! There are many specific forms of anthocyanins too. Delphinidin, named for delphinium flowers, is also the main pigment in Concord grapes, cranberries and Cabernet Sauvignon wine. Peonidin, named for peonies, gets into our diet from cranberries, plums, grapes and cherries. Petunidin was

named for petunias and shows up in various red and pink veggies.

They are all important in our diet because all of these beautiful red, pink and purple colors are also antioxidants. That helps protect our bodies from cancer. They slow down how fast cancer cells grow, and convince other cancer cells to die faster. Some pigments kill cancer cells directly. Cancers of the throat, colon and prostate seem to be particularly sensitive to some of these red colors.

They protect us from inflammation, and some may actually kill bacteria and prevent infections directly. This helps prevent heart disease and damage to our arteries.

There's some evidence these pigments might slow down our progress toward diabetes. In the laboratory at least they slow down how fast cells get old. They keep nerve cells working longer, so they might slow down nervous system diseases. They seem to help the pancreas keep making insulin, so improve control of diabetes.

Some studies suggest that they might help us lose weight. Of course just eating more fruits and vegetables is a good way to lose weight too. People who eat more of these red foods keep their memory functioning better and longer. Most of us have heard that cranberries or cranberry juice is good for our bladders, to prevent urinary tract infections. That's due at least partly to the red pigments.

So here are suggestions for some healthy Valentine's treats. Form pizza dough into heart shape. Add plenty of tomatoes and other red veggies. Go easy on the pepperoni though! Toss plenty of cherry or grape tomatoes in the salad with sliced or diced sweet red pepper. Or use red cabbage for cole slaw. Add cinnamon red-hots to applesauce or mix with low-fat popcorn for a pink snack. For the kids, use cookie

cutters to make heart-shaped sandwiches with grape or strawberry jam. Or spread the hearts with peanut butter and decorate with dried cranberries.

Of course, reds are good for us all year long, don't limit them to just one day.

Here's a dish the kids should enjoy, no need to tell them it's so healthy. Enjoy!

### Italian Beans and Franks

|   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 1 lb turkey Italian sausage             | 1/4 C water                      |
| 1 each red and green sweet bell peppers | 1 medium red onion               |
| 1 tsp minced garlic                     | 1 Tbsp oil                       |
| 1 can 15-oz red kidney beans            | 1 can 15-oz great northern beans |
| 1 can 14.5-oz diced tomatoes            | 1/4 C dry red wine (or water)    |
| 1 tsp thyme, sage or Italian seasoning  |                                  |

Cook sausage with water in covered skillet until cooked through. Cool. Cut into 1/2- inch slices. Drain and rinse beans in colander. Dice peppers and onion. Heat oil in covered skillet. Add vegetables and garlic. Saute over medium heat until tender. Add sausage, beans, undrained tomatoes and rest of ingredients. Simmer 10 minutes.

Serves 6. (Recipe adapted from NorthHarvest Bean Growers Assoc.)

*Hillsborough County Extension is a cooperative service of the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners and the University of Florida.*

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is an Equal Employment Opportunity - Affirmative Action Employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, sex, age, handicap or national origin. COOPERATIVE EXTENSION IN AGRICULTURE, HOME ECONOMICS, STATE OF FLORIDA, IFAS, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AND BOARDS OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COOPERATING