

## **PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.

Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

### Hearts and Valentines

Yes, Valentine's Day is almost here. It's February, so that means it's American Heart Month too. Please, be good to your heart. Eat well, and get your exercise. But don't believe some of the recent news about what to eat or avoid to keep your heart healthy! They might sound good, but there's no good evidence behind them.

One of the reports that got a lot of press in the electronic media, and that should be ignored, was that fish oil doesn't help prevent heart attacks. The claim was that combining many studies about fish oil showed that it did no good. Unfortunately, despite all the press coverage, most experts disagree. One of the big problems was that all the studies they included were too short. Starting today to take fish oil capsules probably won't make a difference next year. But long-term studies, that covered many more years and many more people, did show very positive results, especially in people who had not had a heart attack. If you're all ready taking statins, then adding fish or fish oil might not make as large a difference. But for the rest of us, eating fish several times a week is definitely a good idea for your heart.

Another story that hit the popular press was that we really don't need to limit our salt intake. In fact, the author claimed that people who limited their salt were more likely to die with high blood pressure and strokes. Once again, these claims were based on some very suspicious studies. One used people on dialysis, who were all ready dehydrated and had very low salt levels. They were all ready in heart failure! Taking salt away from them would do nothing to help them. In another study people reported such extremely low salt intakes that they could not have been living and eating that way for very long. Either they were on very extreme diets, or were not reporting all they were eating. Results from them would not do the rest of us trying to live normal lives any good!

All the national health organizations and major health experts agree that limiting our sodium intake could save thousands of lives a year. Less salt would mean less hypertension, fewer strokes, fewer heart attacks, less kidney failure, and much, much happier hearts! Start cutting back on how much salt you use. Read labels and choose foods with lower sodium content. Cook more at home

where you can be in control. There are many kinds of salt free seasoning available now. We can buy most canned and frozen vegetables, even tomatoes, with no salt added. Be adventurous with your eating, and live a lot longer to enjoy life.

One recommendation from the popular press that is very popular with the public does seem to have more good evidence behind it: Chocolate might be good for you! Chocolate has a certain kind of antioxidants that help relax our blood vessels. That lowers blood pressure. And these antioxidants seem to protect the lining of the heart. They might help manage diabetes. Unfortunately, how the chocolate is produced will affect, and usually reduce the amount of antioxidants. But that doesn't mean you can chow down on several candy bars! Since an ounce of dark chocolate has over 150 calories, you want to limit how much of it you enjoy. Select dark chocolate, because that has the most real chocolate. Milk chocolate has more sugar (calories) and less chocolate. Higher % cocoa content on the label is better. The ingredient list should only show cocoa butter, not other vegetable oils, especially not palm or coconut oils. If there are nuts, almonds would be the better choice.

So yes, go buy a box of dark chocolates for your sweetie, and your own heart. Savor them slowly, one a day to spread out the joy. Eat fish more often and salt less often. Take long walks with your sweetie. And live long, heart-healthy lives!

Here's an easy fish chowder to warm your insides on these chilly days and make your heart happy too. Look for low sodium canned soup. Adjust to chilies to your taste.

#### Fish Chowder

1 ½ lbs grouper or other firm fish	1 cup water
2 (10 oz) cans cream of potato soup	1 qt low fat or skim milk
1 (15 oz) can whole kernel corn, no added salt	1-2 small jalapeño chilies
2 Tbsp margarine	1 bay leaf
¼ cup minced onion	1/8 tsp black pepper

Thaw fish if frozen, remove skin, cut into 1-inch pieces. Remove seeds from chilies and mince finely. Bring water to boil in large saucepan, add fish. Simmer 8-10 minutes until fish flakes easily with a fork. Add all ingredients to fish and cook just until heated through. Remove bay leaf. Garnish with parsley sprigs or paprika if desired. Serves 6.

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