

Living Fit: Help Stamp Out Diets!

Chocolate, Wine & Other Healthy (& Tasty) Stuff

Growing up in the South as I did, the four main food groups were sugar, salt, fat and mayonnaise (preferably Hellman's). And until a few years ago, I never really worried about what I ate. I simply ate food that tasted good. Words like "nutritious food" never really entered my mind or my mouth. But once I crossed that half-century age mark — certain parts of my body started "rearranging." I knew that I had to change my eating habits and I found myself faced with the worst of all four-letter words — DIET.

And that's what I struggled with until six years ago when I met the love of my life, Virginia. She was (and still is) a healthy, physically fit, nutrition-focused, organic-minded, beautiful person. We married in 2000 and life was perfect, right up until she started using words like "tofu," "fat-free," "soy-based" and, of all things, "egg-free" mayonnaise! Life as I knew it was coming to an end.

Naturally, I protested mightily until one day she used the ultimate weapon strictly reserved for the female gender, "Honey, if you really love me and want to spend a healthy, long life with me, you've got to try to change your eating habits."

So, I started listening to my wife and trying her version of healthy eating. And, I must admit, I was surprised! Most of what Virginia wanted us to eat tasted really good — even that "egg-free" mayonnaise she used. On top of everything else, it turned out that Virginia hated the word DIET as much as I did. She made a great point: If you don't enjoy what you're eating, you won't keep eating it, no matter how good it may be for you. Did I tell you how much I love that woman?

By the way, that "egg-free" (cholesterol free) mayonnaise that tastes even better than Hellman's (I can't believe I'm saying that) is called Vegenaïse and can be found in the refrigerated section of the healthier supermarkets. If you don't agree with me, bring the unused portion to our *20 Minutes To Fitness* studio and I'll personally refund your money. But, back to our nutrition journey.

But first, a quick side note: Since my "conversion," we have tried a number of new recipes — all of which are healthy (of course), easy to make, include ingredients that can be found at any Publix, and taste great. And we want to share some of our favorite recipes, which appear at the end of the article. Also, we have included these and more of our favorites at our Web site, <http://www.20minutestofitness.com>. And, now for the best part.

Wine and chocolate are good for you! You read it right. We learned this from a couple of experts (and good friends) and you can ask them yourselves if it seems too good to be true. Chef Judy Gallagher (Cooking in Paradise) and Nutritionist Florey Miller (NutritionCare™) will be happy to tell you all about the healthy benefits of wine and chocolate.

Here are some basic nutritional facts about wine and chocolate, starting with wine and what is now referred to as the "French Paradox." Some years ago, nutritionists were wondering how the French, who had such a high fat diet also had a lower incidence of heart attacks than any other part of the world. The conclusions they reached had to do with the French population's consumption of wine — especially red wine.

Why is red wine good for you? The fermented skin and seeds of the grapes hold the answer. They contain concentrated doses of several beneficial and disease-fighting antioxidants, including the number one antioxidant, "resveratrol." Although the skin and seeds of nearly all grapes are red, the skin and seeds of what will become the white wine are removed early in the wine making process. But the skin and seeds of the red wine are not removed. And while moderation is always the best policy, research shows that a couple of glasses of red wine a day for men and a glass a day for women offer a number of important health benefits, including:

- Preventing harmful elements in the body ("free radicals") from attacking healthy cells.
- Aiding in the prevention of heart disease and strokes by increasing oxygen to the blood, which thins the blood

and keeps the individual blood cells (platelets) from sticking together and forming blood clots.

– Also aiding in the prevention of high blood pressure and heart disease by reducing the LDL cholesterol (the bad one) and the build up of arterial plaque.

– Further helping in the prevention of heart disease by regulating nitric oxide which allows blood to flow smoothly through the vessels.

– Improving the breathing process and lung capacity by reducing lung tissue inflammation which can cause chronic lung diseases.

– As a result of the phytoestrogen contained in the red wine, benefiting certain conditions affected by a decrease in natural estrogen (including menopause, breast cancer, osteoporosis and cardiovascular diseases).

– Improving liver function.

– From positive results of continuing studies in fighting cancer, including leukemia, colon, prostate, breast, ovarian, and skin melanoma by: Minimizing the cancer causing DNA mutations; inhibiting the process that leads to the growth of cancer — blocking the formation of the blood vessels which "feed" the cancer cells; causing certain cancer cells to self-destruct.

Now don't be discouraged and start throwing out your white wine. While red wine provides more benefits, white wine is quite healthy too:

– It contains potassium salt which has a diuretic effect, thereby cleansing the kidneys.

– Improves digestion.

– Due to the presence of certain acids (tyrosol and caffeic), proving anti-inflammatory benefits.

And now let's take a look at Virginia's favorite — chocolate, especially dark chocolate. This tasty treat contains disease fighting antioxidants called "flavonoids," which are believed to help the cells resist damage caused by free radicals. These free radicals are formed by our body's defense mechanisms initiated by typical unhealthy intrusions including the breathing of environmental contaminants like cigarette smoke. The lack of the proper amount of these antioxidants can lead to increases in the "bad" LDL cholesterol, high cell oxidation (aging) and plaque formation in the arteries, which can result in life threatening heart disease. The reason for preferring dark chocolate is that it appears to retain the highest level of flavonoids than the other forms of chocolate.

Once again, with both wine and chocolate — moderation is the key.

So there you go. I still have a Southerner's heart, but now it's a healthier heart. I'm also a health-minded, satisfied eater and if I can do it — anyone can.

Alfred R. Roach, Jr. and his wife, Virginia Phillips, own 20 Minutes to Fitness®, a private high intensity strength training studio located in Lakewood Ranch. Training sessions are individually supervised by certified personal trainers and are by appointment only. Telephone: 309.8989. Web site: www.20minutestofitness.com

Some of our favorite recipes:

Buffalo Chicken Tenders or Chunks

Ingredients:

- 3 tablespoons hot pepper sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 3/4 teaspoon ground red pepper
- 1 pound chicken tenders or cut up chicken breast into chunks
- 1/2 cup fat free blue cheese
- 1/4 cup reduced fat sour cream
- 2 tablespoons crumbled blue cheese

Marinade: Combine teriyaki sauce (low sodium), honey, garlic and lime to taste in small bowl. Garnish with celery and/or red bell peppers.

Preparation:

Combine pepper sauce, paprika, and ground red pepper in small bowl — brush on all surfaces of chicken. Place chicken in baking pan coated in nonstick, fat-free cooking spray, cover and marinate in refrigerator for 30 minutes. Bake at 375 degrees, uncovered about 15 minutes, or until chicken is no longer pink inside. Makes 10 servings.

Dip: Combine fat free blue cheese dressing, reduced fat sour cream and crumbled blue cheese in small bowl.

Per Serving Nutrition Information: 83 calories; 2g fat; 5g carbohydrates; 9g protein; 27mg cholesterol; 180 mg sodium. Diabetes exchanges: 1/2 starch/bread. 1 lean meat.

Creamy Ricotta with Pineapple-Mango Salsa

Ingredients:

- 1 cup part skim ricotta cheese
- 2 ounces low fat cream cheese, softened
- 3 Tbsp Splenda
- 1/2 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 cup diced fresh pineapple
- 1 cup diced fresh mango
- 1 Tbsp chopped fresh mint

Preparation: In a blender or food processor, blend ricotta, cream cheese, Splenda and vanilla until smooth. Place in a bowl and refrigerate two hours or overnight. Combine the pineapple, mango and mint. Divide ricotta mixture into three dessert cups and top each with the pineapple-mango salsa. Serves three.

Per Serving Nutrition Information: 195 calories, 32 percent of calories from fat, 21g carbohydrate, 12g protein, 7g fat, 28mg cholesterol, 201mg sodium and 2g fiber. Diabetes exchanges: 1 carbohydrate, 2 protein, 1 fat.

Lemon-Lime Shrimp Salad

Ingredients:

- 1 clove garlic
- 3 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp hoisin sauce
- 1/8 tsp red pepper flakes
- Pinch of white pepper
- 1 lb medium peeled shrimp
- 1 head cabbage, grated
- 1 carrot, grated
- 1 cup chopped watercress
- 2 ripe red tomatoes, quartered
- 1/3 cup lime juice
- 2 Tbsp honey
- 2 Tbsp chopped fresh basil
- 2 Tbsp chopped dry roasted peanuts

Preparation: In blender, combine garlic, lemon juice, hoisin sauce, red pepper flakes and white pepper. Purée until smooth and marinate shrimp for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, toss cabbage, carrot and watercress together in a large salad bowl. Combine lime juice and honey, pour over cabbage salad and toss to mix. Cook shrimp in a nonstick pan with marinade for two to three minutes. It's done when shrimp turns pink. Mound the shrimp in middle of salad and place quartered tomatoes around the edges of bowl. Garnish with basil and peanuts. Serves four.

Per serving Nutrition Information: 265 calories, 14 percent of calories from fat, 9g carbohydrate, 26g protein, 4g fat, 172mg cholesterol, 235mg sodium, and 2g fiber. Diabetes exchanges: 1 carbohydrate, 4 protein, 1 fat. (Recipe courtesy of the American Institute for Cancer Research's New American Plate).