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A SWEET FOR YOUR SWEETIE

Valentine’s Day is almost upon us, a time when thoughts turn to love, romance, and, most importantly, chocolate! There is something about the deep richness and silky texture of a good chocolate fudge, pudding or cake that speaks to our senses like no other dessert. Fret not those of you committed to healthful eating, for even chocolate can be incorporated into your holiday fare.

South American tribes viewed chocolate as a food of the gods. For many, especially women, it remains just that! Debra Waterhouse, registered diettitian and bestselling author of the book, Why Women Need Chocolate: Proof That a Little of What You Fancy Really Does Do You Good, says chocolate is the number-one craved food among women. The book explains the gender difference in food cravings and why the female biology triggers a craving for chocolate and other foods.

Since the initial publishing of her book in 1995, researchers at the University of California at Davis, reviewed a number of studies on the health benefits of chocolate, particularly dark chocolate. They found that the main flavonoids found in cocoa, are associated with a decreased risk of cardiovascular disease. Additionally the fat in chocolate, a combination of saturated and unsaturated, does not appear to increase blood cholesterol levels.

But before you reach for that 5-pound heart-shaped box of confections, remember chocolate remains a high fat, high sugar, and high calorie food. Only one ounce (30 grams) of dark chocolate provides 160 calories, 18 grams of carbohydrate, and 10 grams of fat. What equals an ounce? Around five Hershey’s kisses. The dark chocolate Hershey’s kisses come in a purple foil wrapper.

Chocolate comes from cacao beans that, when finely ground, yield a thick liquid, half of which is fat. This fat, called cocoa butter, helps give chocolate its flavor and texture. Cocoa is processed into a variety of chocolate products to remove the pungent taste. This pungent taste comes from the flavonoids, which provide the heart healthy benefits.
Understanding the differences between the many types of chocolate can help you choose the exact indulgence you desire. This helps eliminate unwanted calories consumed in the pursuit of that perfect chocolate experience. The following list may help you identify your favorite:

**Unsweetened chocolate**—also called baking chocolate, this chocolate has no added sugar and is not intended as an “eating” chocolate. Composed of 55% cocoa butter, it has an intense chocolate flavor that must be mellowed by sugar and other ingredients.

**Bittersweet or semisweet chocolate**—this is the chocolate often called for in baking recipes. “Bittersweet” and “semisweet” are often used interchangeably but there is a difference between the two. Bittersweet chocolate contains more chocolate liquor (a paste formed from roasted and ground cocoa beans) than semisweet. Both have a deep, intense flavor and smoothness. Sugar, vanilla, and cocoa butter may be added to increase the richness of the taste. **Dark chocolate** is synonymous with semisweet, and the extra dark with bittersweet.

**Sweet chocolate**—This chocolate is similar to bittersweet or semisweet but has more sugar added and less chocolate liquor. It can be substituted for semisweet chocolate in recipes without an obvious change in texture.

**Milk chocolate**—This chocolate has a mild and mellow flavor. It is less robust than either bittersweet or semisweet chocolate. It has only 10% chocolate liquor and thus is much lower in flavonoids. Milk chocolate is the most popular form of chocolate in the United States.

**White chocolate**—While white chocolate does not actually contain any chocolate at all, it does contain cocoa butter. The cocoa butter is blended with milk and sugar to lend creaminess. White chocolate is used both as an eating and baking chocolate.

**Cocoa powder**—There are two types of cocoa: regular (or American) and Dutch process (also labeled “European process”). The Dutch process cocoa has a deeper color and stronger flavor than the regular cocoa because it is treated with an alkali to neutralize acidity. Cocoa powder has far less fat and calories than the other chocolates listed because the cocoa butter has been removed. This makes it ideal for low-fat chocolate baking provided other recipe ingredients can provide some moisture and richness normally supplied by cocoa butter.

Ideally, chocolate is best tasted on an empty stomach. The proper temperature should be between 66° and 77° Fahrenheit. When tasting dark chocolate, let the chocolate sit in your mouth for a few seconds to release its primary flavors and aromas. Then, chew it a few times to release the secondary aromas.

In reality, most of my chocolate is consumed at the end of a meal. Just a taste will do me and here are some of my favorite indulges all for only 100-120 calories….

- Swiss Miss® fudge bar
- Trader Joe’s® 100 Calorie 79% Dark Chocolate Bars
- JELLO® Chocolate Pudding Snack
- Girl Scout Thin Mint® Cookies (3 cookies)
Here are some chocolate recipes you may consider offering to your Valentine. Enjoy their great taste-without the guilt!

**CUPID’S BROWNIES**
*These chocolate treats contain 118 calories and 4 grams of fat per brownie.*
*Note: Nonfat cream cheese is used with cocoa powder to provide the richness of fat.*

Vegetable cooking spray
1/2 cup all-purpose flour
3 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
1/4 teaspoon baking powder
1/3 cup nonfat cream cheese, softened
1 cup sugar
3 1/2 ounces semisweet chocolate, melted
5 teaspoons vegetable oil
1 egg
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Preheat oven to 350° F. Coat an 8x8x2 inch baking pan with vegetable cooking spray. In a medium bowl, stir together flour, cocoa, and baking powder. Set aside. In another medium bowl, beat together cream cheese and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in melted chocolate and vegetable oil. Add egg and vanilla extract and beat again. Beat in flour mixture and mix until smooth. Spoon into prepared pan. Bake for 35 minutes or until firm. Cool pan on wire rack. Cut into 16 pieces.

**COLD CHOCOLATE SOUFFLÉS** -- Each soufflé contains 150 calories and 3 grams of fat

1 envelope unflavored gelatin
1/4 cup cold water
2 tablespoons tub margarine
1 1/2 cups cold skim milk, divided
1/2 cup sugar
1/3 cup Dutch process cocoa powder
2 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract, divided
1 envelope dry whipped topping mix

In a microwave-safe bowl, sprinkle gelatin over water; let stand 2 minutes to soften. Microwave on high (100%) for 40 seconds; stir thoroughly. Stir in margarine until melted; let stand 2 minutes or until gelatin is completely dissolved. In a smaller mixing bowl, stir together 1 cup milk, sugar, cocoa and 2 teaspoons vanilla extract. Beat on low speed of mixer while gradually pouring in gelatin mixture. Beat until well blended. Prepare topping mix as directed on package, using remaining 1/2 cup milk and remaining 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract. Carefully fold whipped topping into chocolate mixture until well blended. Spoon into 6 custard cups or 6 soufflé dishes fitted with foil collars that extend 1 inch above dish rim. Cover; refrigerate until firm, about 3 hours. Serves 6.
**CHOCOLATE–RASPBERRY SAUCE** - Each tablespoon provides 32 calories & less than 1g fat. Note: Serve over low-fat ice cream, ice milk, frozen yogurt, angel food cake or low-fat pound cake.

3/4 cup frozen unsweetened raspberries, thawed  
1/2 cup sugar  
1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder  
2 tablespoons cornstarch  
1 1/2 cups plus 1 tablespoon evaporated skim milk  
1 (1 ounce) square unsweetened chocolate

Place raspberries in a blender; cover and process 1 minute or until smooth, scraping sides of container once. Place puree in a wire-mesh strainer over a bowl; press with the back of a spoon against the sides of the strainer to squeeze out juice. Discard pulp and seeds remaining in the strainer. Set puree aside. Combine sugar, cocoa, and cornstarch in a saucepan. Add milk; stir with wire whisk until smooth. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until thickened. Add chocolate; stir until chocolate melts. Cool completely. Stir in raspberry puree. Use as noted above. Makes about 2 cups.

**CHEWY CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES** – Contains barley & oats, both soluble fiber, that lowers cholesterol. One cookie provides 74 calories, 3 grams of fat, & 1 gram of fiber.

1/2 cup softened butter  
1/2 cup firmly packed dark brown sugar  
1/2 cup granulated sugar  
3 tablespoons honey  
2 eggs  
2 teaspoons vanilla  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
2 cups rolled oats  
1 cup all purpose flour  
1 cup Post Grape Nuts® cereal  
1/2 cup dark chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 350° F. Place butter and sugar in large mixing bowl. Beat together on medium speed until smooth. Add honey, eggs, and vanilla and mix well. Add baking soda, salt, oats, flour, and cereal and stir just until mixed. Stir in chocolate chips.

Drop rounded tablespoons of dough 2 inches apart onto greased cookie sheet or lined with parchment paper. Bake for 10 to 14 minutes until golden brown. After 3 minutes and remove from pan and place on wire rack to cool. Store in air-tight container

Makes 4 dozen cookies.

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