

Experts provide tips on how to have a sweet Valentine's day without all the sugar

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt are urging parents to limit the amount of sugary sweets this Valentine's Day, and focus on fun, healthy alternatives for children.

With recent increases in [childhood obesity](#) and type 1 and 2 [diabetes](#) across the nation, physicians at the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt are urging parents to limit the amount of sugary sweets this Valentine's Day, and focus on fun, healthy alternatives for children.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 25.8 million people, or 8.3 percent of the U.S. population, are affected by either type 1 or type 2 diabetes, and more than 15,000 children are diagnosed with type 1 diabetes each year.

A common misconception with diabetes, says Martha Upchurch, R.D., a registered dietitian in Vanderbilt's Eskind Pediatric Diabetes Clinic, is that sugar is the "bad guy." She says that children with type 1 diabetes simply lack the insulin to metabolize the sugar.

"It's okay for them to eat some candy. That's one of the joys of being a kid," she says. "But moderation is the key. Valentine's Day presents a lot of opportunities for excess."

Upchurch recommends providing smaller portions of sweets, as well as not allowing them to linger around the house after Valentine's Day. There are also a host of inexpensive gifts parents can give their children

other than candy, like stickers, pencils or festive socks.

In addition, she says parents should be mindful of treats served at class parties and other activities.

“We want children with diabetes to have the same experiences that their classmates are having,” says Upchurch. “If they can’t participate, or they have to take their treats home, it’s hard for a young child to understand that.”

She says parents and teachers can make modifications like providing smaller individual portions of sweets, or sending 100-calorie snack packs, fruit trays or sugar-free drinks.

Below are a few suggestions to help make this year’s Valentine’s Day a healthy and happy one for all children.

- Use a heart-shaped cookie cutter to make heart pancakes or toast for breakfast, or sandwiches for lunch.
- Send temporary tattoos, stickers or pencils for the class party instead of candy.
- Have a “red food day” (tomatoes, grapefruit, watermelon and red peppers). These foods have lycopene, which is a powerful antioxidant.
- Offer chocolate-covered strawberries or banana coins with sugar-free chocolate syrup as a sweet treat.
- Make smaller serving sizes of treats such as mini cupcakes or bite-sized cookies.

Provided by Vanderbilt Medical Center

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