

Ideas for a safe, healthy Valentine's Day everyone can love

February 3 2021, by Michael Merschel



"Valentine's Day in a Pandemic" sounds like the title of a terrible album,

or maybe the least-romantic date night movie ever. Unfortunately, it's also reality in 2021.

That doesn't mean the day can't be fun, said experts who suggested ways to stay safe while celebrating.

Dr. Alson Inaba, a pediatric emergency medicine specialist at the Kapi'olani Medical Center for Women & Children in Honolulu, knows more than a little about matters of the [heart](#): He was the first to teach CPR to the rhythm of "Stayin' Alive," an idea that spread worldwide.

For the sake of staying alive, nobody should forget the dangers of the coronavirus, he said. Even as people get vaccinated, they still need to protect themselves and others by wearing a mask, keeping a [safe distance](#) from people outside their household, avoiding large gatherings, washing hands and not sharing food and drinks.

But don't despair, romantics.

Inaba, who also has a knack for speaking in phrases that would be right at home on a Valentine's Day card, added, "It is still OK to share your heart, but be smart."

This is the year to get creative, said Maya Vadiveloo, an assistant professor in the department of nutrition and food sciences at the University of Rhode Island. Start with the way you think about that romantic dinner for two.

"It seems like now's a good time to revamp the stay-at-home date nights with cooking a meal together, rather than going out to a restaurant, where you're potentially exposed to more people," she said. "If normally you would have gone to some exclusive restaurant, you can potentially cook one of those meals together at home and still set the mood" with a

fancy table setting, candles and flowers.

Top chefs have been releasing recipes to try, Vadiveloo said. For those less confident in the kitchen, there's always takeout.

And yes, you can enjoy such a meal in a healthy way. People have an unfortunate tendency to go all-or-nothing on decadent foods, she said, but the key is finding balance.

Most of the time, you should have a heart-healthy diet—"primarily fruits and vegetables, heart-healthy oils, whole grains, legumes and other healthier sources of protein," she said.

But that doesn't mean you have to say no if your partner presents you with the traditional Valentine's fare.

"If you really enjoy, for example, a good French baguette, and that's what you're planning to have for Valentine's Day, perhaps starting with some (vegetables) first so that you're not starving once it comes time for the bread and the cheese and the wine," Vadiveloo said. "And make sure you're having a reasonable portion."

That thinking applies to Valentine's sweets as well. "We see people getting these monster boxes of chocolates, and that's where the problem is," she said. Consider getting a smaller box of a really good chocolate instead. Or maybe serve fondue with dark chocolate, "where you're also having fresh fruit with it."

The coronavirus remains a widespread problem, so this isn't the year to be out and about with your love, Inaba said. "After your special dinner, relax at home," he said. His rhyme to encourage that: "Just chill—don't get ill."

Vadiveloo suggested an online cooking class or dance lessons for couples. For kids and families, it can be a good time to do something for other people.

"It doesn't always have to be food-related," or even focused on romance, she said. Families can try making their own valentines or other crafty projects, and surprising neighbors with them.

If people can find creative ways to celebrate that stay within Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines, "we're going to bounce back more quickly and not have a Valentine's Day like this again next year," she said.

And, of course, Inaba has a rhyme for that, too: "Chocolates and flowers, dinner and wine, follow these tips, and you will be fine."

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