



## Love at first bite

**WE ALL HAVE THEM: FOODS WE CAN'T RESIST. IF ONLY WE COULD MAKE OUR FAVE CRAVINGS MORE HEALTHY... GOOD NEWS! WE CAN**

**LOVE IS IN THE AIR...**and a little anxiety too. The inevitable box of Valentine's chocolates has landed in my lap. My love knows no bounds as I tenderly caress these sweet, soft bundles before diving in, reminding myself there's no such thing as a "good" or "bad" food. That is, until they've all disappeared, my gut aches and I've nothing left to contemplate but my overindulgence — again.

Managing my BFFs (Best Foods Forever) is twice as hard when love is involved. I'm talking chips, cheese, wine, white carbs and chocolate. I'm deeply attached to my fave five and can't fathom divorce as an option. But I can mediate and change their nature, lessen-

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ing the hurt factor (fat content and those cruel calories), and double their goodness, by upping fibre, phytochemicals, minerals and vitamins. The result is a healthier me who can still find romance at the end of a fork or bottom of a glass.

**1st  
love**

### **A crunchy conundrum**

“The big question with potato chips,” points out Toronto weight-loss coach Yanina Jezek, is pretty simple: “Can you have just one? And if you carry a bag to the TV, you’re done!” Some foods trigger the inner wolf in women, and Jezek’s approach is traffic control with red-, yellow- and green-light foods.

Here’s how it works: Put all those foods you can’t control in your red-light category. Yellow light refers to “sometimes foods” and green is, well, what you know you can eat in moderation, day in, day out.

“If potato chips are a red-light food for you,” says Jezek, keep them out of sight and out of your home, and “revisit them later,” because she’s optimistic your resolve and taste buds can change over time.

Or find a substitute love such as roasted nori seaweed (found at bulk, health and Asian food stores), which is chip-like and salty without the fat. One four-gram bag of Wang brand seasoned seaweed contains 10 light-as-a-feather sheets, a mere gram of fat, 80 milligrams of sodium and more minerals (some count 56) than any land-loving vegetable.

A less quick, but very tasty (heart-coloured!) alternative is oven-roasted beet chips, which pack a folate and fibre punch. All you need is one peeled large beet and a mandoline to make 1/8-inch (3-mm) slices. Pat the cut chips dry with paper towel, toss in a bowl with two teaspoons (10 mL) of olive oil, arrange on two baking sheets lined with parchment paper, sprinkle with coarse sea salt and roast at 325F (160C) for up to 45 minutes, until golden and crisp.

**2nd  
love**

### **Sinfully creamy**

Toronto nutritionist Theresa Albert doesn’t mince words when it comes to cheese. She opens the chapter “Cheese: A condiment, not a meal” in *Ace Your Health: 52 Ways to Stack Your Deck* by writing, “One of the hardest things about going to my book club is



avoiding the cheese platter.” She then gives us three good reasons for curbing the mighty cheese tooth: fat, lack of nutrients per calorie and salt.

“Many cheeses are so high in saturated fat that they make steak look like diet food,” says Albert, who struck down a personal passion of mine — triple-cream brie — with heart-wrenching stats: It contains 70 to 75 per cent fat, which is “as close to butter as a knife can get.”

Her solution? Turn to dips.

“Don’t avoid guacamole,” she says. It may be high in fat, but it’s mostly good-for-you, monounsaturated fats (enjoy in moderation, of course). High-fibre, homemade bean dips made smooth with more water than oil can offer refuge at parties — especially when raw veggies versus high-fat crackers are the dipping vehicle.

But for some, nothing but cheese will do, and Jezek says low-fat cheeses don’t have to taste rubbery. “I love Mini Babybel Light,” for taste, nutrition and instant portion control: A 20-gram single serving contains 50 calories, three grams of fat, six grams of protein and almost one-fifth of your daily calcium needs.

PHOTO CREDIT

3rd  
love

## Raise a glass

Alcohol, it turns out, is usually a yellow-light food. While no health professional would encourage an abstainer to start drinking, moderate alcohol consumption has been shown to have a protective effect on reducing coronary heart disease. Moderate means seven drinks a week or a maximum of one drink a day. And as Albert notes, that maximum has “no rollover points. You can’t store them up and drink them later!”

If that drink is wine, the serving size is five ounces, yet wineglasses often balloon into supersize. That’s why Jezek suggests pulling out a champagne flute when you’re in search of an easy and elegant way to curb indulgent imbibing. She also suggests pacing every small glass of wine with a follow-up glass of water or opting for wine spritzers, which have half the wine.

Red wine contains resveratrol, an antioxidant that’s been studied and reported to have cancer-protecting properties and even weight-loss powers. But Joe Schwarcz, a chemistry professor at McGill University in Montreal, cautions women to hold their stemware steady, saying the jury is still out on resveratrol. He points out the most captivating studies have been done on mice fed so much resveratrol it would be equivalent to hundreds of bottles of wine.

Something else to consider: A new study suggests women who regularly imbibe in small amounts of alcohol (as few as three drinks a week) have a higher risk of breast cancer. In light of this research, women should “weigh the modest risk of light to moderate alcohol use on breast cancer development against the beneficial effects on cardiovascular disease,” says Wendy Chen, the study’s lead author.

4th  
love

## Carbolicious

As a baker, I’ve seen how my girlfriends react when a loaf comes out of the oven. First they swoon, then their eyes open wide. Yet before any pleasure or enjoyment is found, remorse sets in with comments such as, “Stop tormenting me!” or “I crave carbs more than anything else!”

Croissants, baguettes, bagels and perky cupcakes call out to us. It seems the whiter and more refined they are, the stronger these carbs tug at our heartstrings while wreaking havoc on our blood sugar levels. Empty in nutrients, high in calories, addictive in flavour, refined carbs are no more satisfying than a one-night stand that slaps us the next morning on the bathroom scales. Let’s face it,

ladies: As the years march on, our metabolisms can barely keep up. We sit in a perfect storm for weight gain as our energy needs diminish yet our frenzied psyches search out Mr. Wrong on the palate.

But this can be a guilt-free love affair if we simply toss out the white stuff and bring on the whole grains. That way, frazzled mood swings can reap the grounding force of soothing serotonin, while our appetites find satiety in the fibre and nutrients found in rye, oatmeal, sprouted grains, spelt or Kamut.

Bread is just the beginning. Exchange white rice for brown, wild or a blend. Cook up a pot of chewy, satisfying barley or protein-packed quinoa. But if bread still beckons, indulge in some mini multigrain pitas. Check labels to source out low-fat, whole-grain versions garnished with good-for-you seeds.

5th  
love

## Dark, not dangerous

“Make a date with the food you love,” says registered dietitian Cathy Langdon of Saskatoon. “Sit down, enjoy it, plan ahead and eat it for pleasure, not because you are bored or stressed.” That’s what Lea Amaral of Toronto does each night of the week, except she includes her husband and their date is with chocolate — just a square of something dark and sensual they slowly savour together after dinner.

Amaral, 47, watches what she eats. Owner-operator of Energia Athletics, she’s busy teaching yoga, indoor cycling or kettlebell daily but makes room for dark chocolate knowing it has twice the antioxidants found in milk chocolate, including flavonoids that reduce her risk of heart disease and lower blood pressure. Dark chocolate fights inflammation too, which is recognized as a major determinant of many age-related diseases.

“I look for brands that contain 70 per cent or more cocoa,” says Amaral, who enjoys the pungent, bitter flavour of dark chocolate whether it’s in a square of pure chocolate or the prime ingredient in a decadent, flourless, dark chocolate cake.

When baking up something dark and delicious, choose non-alkalized, 100 per cent pure cocoa powder (not Dutch processed, which has lower flavonoid levels). For a rich mug of cocoa with less fat, whisk together one tablespoon (15 mL) each of honey and cocoa powder, add one cup (250 mL) of boiling water and top it all off with just a little milk and a marshmallow or two.

You gotta love that. **M**