the foods of love

By Carol Plotkin, MS, RD

When we think about food and love, we tend to think about specific foods that put us in the mood for love. The connection between food and love goes much deeper than eating certain foods to increase arousal, however. The right foods can provide vitality, endurance, and improved blood circulation, all very important for a special night with that special person. A healthy diet sets the stage for a fulfilling romantic experience. We've all heard it before: eat more whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and fish. It turns out that what's good for your health is also good for your mojo. We're just beginning to understand how the array of nutrients we get from unprocessed foods impacts our bodies; from the phyto (plant) chemicals in blueberries that help relax blood vessels, to boosting libido by eating enough zinc from meat, whole grains, legumes, and seafood (think oysters). If you abuse your body with foods high in saturated fat and refined carbohydrates, you increase your risk for heart disease and diabetes, two chronic diseases with serious negative ramifications in the love department.

A little foresight is required to set the tone for a romantic evening. Follow a few simple guidelines to help you get ready for that perfect encounter.

1. Eat Breakfast: Breakfast is for champions of love. Eating breakfast is the best way to assure that you have energy which lasts into the night. Breakfast foods such as oatmeal, fortified cereals, milk, and eggs provide a good dose of B-vitamins, which will keep your libido soaring and the stress of courting under control. One of the B-vitamins, niacin, is important for the secretion of histamine, a chemical that your body needs for arousal.

2. Limit Caffeine and Alcohol: In moderation, both are fine, but tip the scale in the direction of excess and your night of romance could be jeopardized. More than three cups of coffee can act as a diuretic and cathartic. While a little caffeine and alcohol may help keep you alert and relaxed, too much could have you spending more of the night in the bathroom than with your lover.

3. Minimize Foods that Create Unpleasant Odors: Many foods that create odors, such as garlic, onions, curried dishes, broccoli, and cauliflower, are good for you. You still want to eat these foods, just not on date night. The alternative is to persuade your date to eat them with you, that way you will both be blissfully ignorant about how you smell to the world.

The best aphrodisiac is feeling good about yourself. The confidence you exude can make you irresistible to others. Some foods can actually help with this. If you want to be assured of a "sure-thing," try one or more of the following:

Celery: Celery doesn't usually come to mind when you think about passion, but this humble vegetable releases pheromones—chemicals that naturally turn us on—with every bite. Munch a few stalks, and you could give another meaning to the expression "rabbit food."

Chocolate: Chocolate contains chemicals that heighten the love experience. One is phenylethylamine—called the "love molecule" because it is suspected to cause the feeling of bliss lovers experience. The other, methylxanthine, is a stimulant responsible for increasing skin sensitivity. Chocolate rightly earns its reputation as a treat for lovers.

Vanilla: The scent of vanilla has been shown to be relaxing, putting people in the mood for intimacy. Light a few vanilla candles and serve vanilla ice cream with a chocolate dessert and you and your intended will soon be in the mood for love.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Carol Plotkin, MS, RD is a registered dietitian. She is owner of ON NUTRITION, a nutrition practice specializing in wellness/disease prevention and sports nutrition. To find out more about her services, go to rochesternutrition.com. Contact her at cplotkin@rochesternutrition.com.

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Corn Hill Center Suite 202
301 Exchange Blvd.
Rochester, NY 14608
585-263-7680