

FEBRUARY | MARCH 2013

# Spark

a new kind of southern



EAT YOUR  
HEART  
OUT

MORE REASONS TO *love* THE FOODS WE *love*

WEDDINGS: A FINE *Marriage* 22 BRIDESMAID *Gift Ideas* 24 HUNTSVILLE *Wedding Style* 25  
MAN ON A *Mission* 13 ROCKET CITY *Renaissance* 14 SPRING *Garden Guide* 20

# EAT YOUR HEART OUT



THE SECRET *health benefits* OF THE FOODS YOU *love*

BY DIANA LACHANCE



Bob Gathany | photography

#### ANYONE WHO HAS BEEN ON A DIET

knows that if something tastes good, it's probably bad for you. But good news, dieters: some of your favorite foods and drinks may actually have some hidden health benefits.

Take beer, for example. Long blamed as a source of empty calories contributing to the dreaded "beer belly," beer actually has some surprising benefits.

"It decreases the risk of kidney stones in men because it has a high water content and a diuretic effect," says Anna H. Key, Registered and Licensed Dietician with the Huntsville Hospital Wellness Center.

It can also lead to stronger bones (thanks to its high silicon content) and lower blood pressure. And some studies have shown it can even guard against Alzheimer's and dementia.

Moreover, says Key, "Not only is it all fat free, but there is even a little more fiber in the darker beers."

As for those empty calories, it's now easier than ever to cut down while drinking up, thanks to the selection of low-calorie beers (and ciders!) on the market these days.

We all know red wine makes the healthy list thanks to its powerful, natural antioxidants such as heart-healthy resveratrol. But it has other health perks as well.

"It can help raise good cholesterol and lower the bad," says Key. "And there's some research indicating that it helps protect the lining of your blood vessels, which in turn helps reduce the formation of blood clots."

Studies have also shown red wine to inhibit the growth of cancer cells and promote the formation of nerve cells. It's important to note, however, that not all red wines are created equal; dryer red wines

PEOPLE IN A POSITION  
TO KNOW SAY THAT  
SOME OF THE FOODS  
YOU LOVE TO EAT ARE  
ALSO GOOD FOR YOUR  
HEALTH. SO SIP A GLASS  
OF WINE, SAVOR THAT  
STEAK AND BITE INTO A  
PIECE OF CHOCOLATE  
WITHOUT FEELING  
GUILTY IN THE LEAST.

tend to be more potent than sweeter ones, making Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Syrah, and Pinot Noir your best bets. Another caveat? More is not necessarily better.

"It's not a cure-all, so if you're not already drinking, I don't recommend starting," says Huntsville cardiologist Dr. William Schneider. "But if you are having a drink a day, you don't need to feel guilty about it."

The same is true of red meat, which despite having a reputation as being high in fat and cholesterol, is actually a healthy addition to any diet if eaten in moderation. The key is to select lean cuts like sirloins or filets.

"Look for words like loin or round," say Key, "since leaner meats don't have as much marbling and saturated fat and cholesterol." What they do have is some noteworthy health benefits. For one thing, unlike processed meats like bacon and sausage, which pose a higher risk of



## THE *diet police* WILL HAVE TO HANG UP THEIR HANDCUFFS.

mortality, lean meats don't seem to increase your risk for heart disease and diabetes. They're also a great source of iron and zinc, B12, and B6.

"The B vitamins are good for energy and metabolism, while zinc is good for wound healing and your immune system," says Key. Even better, "if you marinate meat in beer and wine before grilling, it can reduce the carcinogenic compounds that result from grilling."

Of course, for all you chocoholics out there, moderation might be a tough rule to follow – especially when chocolate, and more specifically, dark chocolate, has so many health benefits.

"Dark chocolate that is 60 to 80 percent cocoa has great antioxidants," says Key. "It can maintain heart health and improve cholesterol, and it may even improve blood sugar levels and help our bodies use insulin more effectively."

Unfortunately, it's also high in sugar and fat, hence the need for moderation. But Key says not to feel bad about the occasional indulgence. "I think that splurging is an important part of an effective diet. You have to plan that cheat – and dark chocolate is better than a big fat piece of cake!"

Ultimately, what it comes down to is making smart choices that allow you to recoup the health benefits of your favorite foods, like red meat or drinks like beer, while limiting their inherent disadvantages.

"These foods and drinks should be used as a supplement to an already healthy diet and a good exercise program," says Schneider, and not relied upon overmuch. "Red wine, for example, is not going to prevent all heart disease."

Key concurs. "It's about making permanent lifestyle changes," she says. "We don't have to cut these things out; we just have to eat or drink them in moderate portion sizes and watch the frequency."

So if you want to enjoy a glass of red wine tonight with a modest portion of lean red meat, go for it. Not only will your taste buds thank you, but your heart will too. \*

