

## Healthy Holiday Gifts

Gifts of fruitcake, fudge, candies and cookies are common during the holiday season. Why not diverge from the usually high-fat, high-sugar holiday standbys? Instead, give your family and friends a treat that will keep their hearts happy and healthy.

### Healthy Holiday Gifts

- **Dark chocolate:** Chocolate, in moderation, is healthy. The darker the chocolate, the more heart-protective antioxidants it contains. Consider gifting two or three variety bars of this healthy decadence.
- **Red wine:** Red wine contains tannins, which, in moderation, have been shown to have heart-healthy properties. Drink red wine with food in order to increase health benefits.
- **Coffee or tea:** Both coffee and tea contain antioxidants that recent research has indicated promote a healthy heart. Include a decorative mug for a personalized touch.
- **Nuts:** Nuts are high in healthy fats. Recent research has shown that adding a small handful of nuts to your diet daily is good for your heart and will not promote weight gain. Choose raw and unsalted varieties to avoid extra sodium and calories from sugar coatings.
- **Olive oil and balsamic vinegar:** Olive oil (particularly virgin or extra-virgin) contains heart-healthy monounsaturated fatty acids, while vinegar helps the body absorb minerals such as calcium. Both are excellent in marinades and in salad dressings.
- **Spices:** They have minimal to zero calories, add variety to everyday foods, and delight the taste buds. There's something special about adding fresh ground salt, pepper, cinnamon or nutmeg to holiday dishes.
- **Whole-wheat bread, cake, muffin or pancake mix:** Take your favorite holiday baked goods up a notch with heart-healthy whole wheat. Prepare the dry ingredients, package in a festive tin and include the recipe.
- **Flaxseed:** One of nature's best-kept health secrets, flaxseed contains heart-healthy Omega 3 fatty acids, shown to help increase HDL (good) cholesterol. Flaxseed is versatile and can be added to cereals, yogurt, smoothies, batters, butters and mixes. Choose the milled variety for the most health benefit.
- **Fruit of the month subscription:** The gift that gives year 'round. Have a variety of fresh, seasonal fruit delivered to your loved one's doorstep each month.

- **Canned fruit, vegetables, jam or jellies:** Have a knack for canning or an interest to learn? Buy up fresh produce from your local farmer's market or pick from your own garden to give a little dose of summer during the holiday season.
- **Lentil or bean soup mix:** Full of fiber and packed with protein, lentils and beans make for a hearty bowl of nutrition and a boost of warmth on a cold winter's day.
- **Homemade muesli:** Encourage your loved one to start the day off with a healthy breakfast minus the additives, artificial sweeteners and excess fat and sugar found in most store-bought varieties. Whole oats, dried fruit and nuts are excellent additions. Put in a decorative jar and attach a fancy spoon to complete the package.

## Resources

- Choose My Plate: [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)

Here when you need us.

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