

# Valentine, I'm in the food for love

By Theresa Wulf

Couples have been using foods to tempt each other since Eve first offered Adam an apple.

Through the centuries, all kinds of foods have gained the reputation of being aphrodisiacs – ones that “arouse or increase sexual desire,” as defined in the dictionary.”

“There’s no scientific evidence to support this,” says Markeen Strauss, registered dietitian at Midlands Community Hospital. “It’s just folklore.

“We don’t believe in this at all. But it is kind of fun to read,” she noted.

About the only research done that proves anything about this folklore is tests on chocolate. According to Robin Hoffman, home economist for Homemakers Schools Inc., chocolate is loaded with a chemical called phenylethylamine (PEA for short).

PEA “is a chemical found in the brains of happy people,” Hoffman said, “and scientists have observed that people disappointed in love tend to eat a lot of chocolate.”

However, she said, researchers are not certain whether the lovesick eat chocolate to regain the PEA they have lost, or whether falling in love raises one’s PEA, or if PEA makes people fall in love.

Before running to the store and buying the biggest box of chocolates on the shelf, be aware that chocolate also can cause headaches. So can other supposedly romantic foods like wine and cheese.

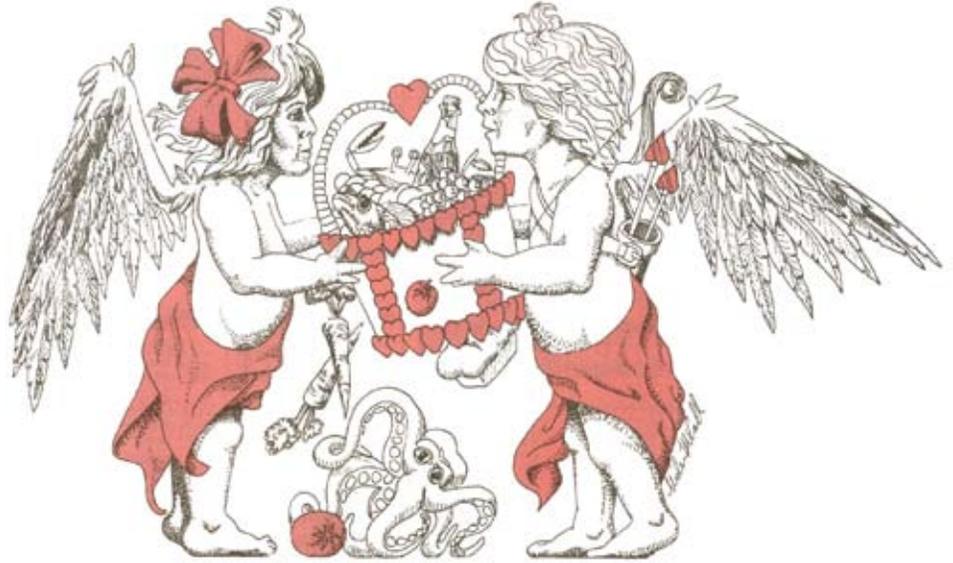
That’s because they all have a chemical called tyramine, which can trigger migraines, according to information from the Midlands Headache Clinic. In the right people, a seemingly romantic snack or dessert really could turn into, “Not tonight, Dear, I have a headache.”

The research ends there, but the rumors and myths and legends go on and on about what food causes what reaction. And the list of aphrodisiacs is as endless as the legends.

Barbara Cartland has written more than 350 romance novels, as well as life stories, histories, dramas, operettas and poetry. She also has written cookbooks, one of them called “The Romance of Food.”

In it she explains why a number of foods are supposed to be arousing. For instance: liver and kidneys, octopus, sow bellies and lizards. How’s that for a main course?

For medicinal purposes, Cartland cites “Le Tableau de la vie Conjugale,” written by a French doctor in 1696. He listed egg yolks, cocks’ testicles, beef marrow, crabs,



shrimp, milk, artichokes, garlic and skinks, which are lizards.

If old men eat these things, the doctor promised, “they will learn how to behave with a young wife so as to be able to procreate children and become stimulated without any damage to their health.”

Here are some other foods and why they’re supposed to be aphrodisiacs:

- **Fish.** According to Cartland, fish can increase sexual prowess because Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty, was born in the sea. Dr. Arnold Lorand wrote in 1916 that the phosphorus in fish may be “the chief activating principle,” she said.

Cartland also said that fish are symbols of good fortune and marital bliss for the Chinese, and wondered if that’s because fish can’t talk.

James Trager writes in his book, “Foodbook,” that the Sultan Saladin proved during the time of the Crusades that fish were fuel for the fires of love.

The Sultan locked up some celibate Muslims, then “fed them well on a diet of meat.” He threw in a couple of lovely concubines, but the “saints emerged from their soft ordeal as pure as the diamond of Visapoor.”

Then the Sultan put the Muslims on a fish diet and threw them back together with the concubines. “And this time the two happy ceonbites (priests) succumbed most marvelously.”

- **Asparagus.** The shape, not the content, of this plant is supposedly is what makes it an aphrodisiac, Cartland said. “The Kama-Sutra advised boiling asparagus and treacle in cow’s milk and glue, and adding spices and licorice. This

is eaten once a day to increase sexual power and prolong life.”

- **Tomatoes.** The Spaniards brought tomatoes from Mexico in the 16th century, according to Cartland. The English call them “love apples,” but the Puritans told their followers that tomatoes were poisonous, because they believed the fruits encouraged “immorality.”

This notion was challenged in 1896 by an English doctor, who said tomatoes “sweetened the blood.” He recommended them for sleeplessness, but it’s hard to be romantic when one is falling asleep.

- **Celery and artichokes.** A Dutch gynecologist recommends these as well as asparagus, according to Trager, because “the acids they contain are filtered and eliminated separately by the kidneys and excite the urinary passages.”

- **Herbs.** All sorts of spices and herbs, from vanilla to tarragon to ginseng and paprika, supposedly are sexual stimulants and restorers of youth, Cartland said.

She cites an elderly Greek: “Find me, oh gods, a herb to make me half the man I was and that would be enough for me – and her.”

And in the “no wonder they recommend this” category, we have grapes.

Throughout Cartland’s cookbook, she recommended grapes several times. Here’s why:

“In the 17th century the Duc de Richelieu used to serve grapes to his friends,” she wrote. “Everyone present at his party – including the ladies who often were society beauties – was completely naked.”

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