



Words *for* Thought:

“Strength means nothing unless it sets you free. Muscles mean nothing unless used to uplift others”

- Dr. Jack Barnathan, NY Strength

Recipe: Protein Pudding

This is a great snack for the evening, when you are craving something creamy or sweet. Cottage cheese is an excellent source of protein.

- ½ cup cottage cheese
- ½ small box Jello-instant pudding mix
- ½ cup milk

Combine all ingredients in a blender until smooth. You may need to add a little more milk to make it smooth. Pour in a dish and enjoy!

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Surviving Another Chocolate Holiday

It's February, the month of love, the month of chocolate. Chocolate candy, chocolate hearts, red and pink m&m's, chocolate-covered strawberries, chocolate boxes, chocolate everything! It's only one day, right? What's the harm in indulging for one day? Let me tell you. There are some people that can't handle it at all. The person on a "diet" or healthy nutrition plan who is trying to lose weight, the diabetic who cannot eat sugar, those who are allergic [and may not even know it] and then the people like me, recovering chocoholics. If you are like me, February 14th is always a challenge. However, it's something I've learned to survive and I want to help you not only survive but thrive as well.

First of all, let me tell you that you can make it through Valentine's Day without chocolate. I know, I too thought this an impossible task. But it is possible. I've done it and I didn't think I ever could. I was raised in a good family, with parents who spoiled us on holidays. We always woke up on Valentine's Day with treats at the table – candy hearts with cute sayings, flowers or trinkets, and a big heart-shaped box of chocolates, every year without fail. When I left home, I still celebrated Valentine's Day every year, whether I had a boyfriend or not. Then I got married to a man who really loves me and really loves to show that he loves me. The heart shaped boxes got even bigger and I could still finish it in a couple of days!

Fast forward 10 years. I lost 75 lbs and decided to face my first healthy Valentine's Day without chocolate. Was it possible? Could I do it? Why would I even want to do it? Fast-forward 7 more years. Chocolate is not even a consideration for me now. So what happened in those 7 years? Honestly, a lot of trial and error. Some years, I had just "a little". Other years, I had too much or none at all. So what was better for me? Physically, emotionally, psychologically – for me – it was those years that I did not indulge in chocolate at all. And I absolutely love chocolate! In fact, I consider myself a chocolate connoisseur. I can name the ingredients in every chocolate candy bar on the market. I can taste the difference in milk chocolate, dark chocolate, crunchy and smooth. I can recommend which fruits taste best covered in chocolate. Oh here we go again!

Am I the only one who can do this? Well, apparently not. If you ask almost any woman any of those

questions they have the same chocolate expertise I do. How does that happen? Is everyone raised the same way I was? Is chocolate something we view as a substitute for "I love you"?

I passed my passion for chocolate on to my kids. Since the time they were old enough to eat, I indulged them as I was indulged. Each Valentine's Day morning brought chocolate treats for everyone. I rationalized that my heart-shaped boxes were smaller and therefore not as bad for them. However, it's still chocolate and at the root of it I felt I was teaching them the same thing I have fought to overcome—chocolate says "I love you."



But wait, isn't chocolate good for you? The TV, radio and magazines say yes, chocolate is healthy for you. It makes you feel good. It makes you healthier. Really? What about what it does to your scale or your sugar levels or your self-esteem? These are questions we cannot avoid. Your decisions today affect so much of your tomorrows. Let me give you some tips on avoiding the Valentine's Day trap.

- ♥ Make a commitment to yourself. Know your reasons and know WHY it is important to you.
- ♥ Substitute normal chocolate gifts with more thoughtful ones, like something your child really wants or something your loved one needs.
- ♥ Keep the focus on how you really feel, not how chocolate makes you feel.
- ♥ Ignore what everyone else does – be healthy and do what you really want to do, not what you have been raised to do or what the media tells you to do.

Start with the small changes that can make a difference in your body. If you are struggling and your need for chocolate is part of that struggle, then be strong and eliminate it from your life. It starts with the inside...

Always here to help you,

Sandi