

# From the heart, for the heart

Candy dandy, but here are other options

By Romi Herron  
For The Sun

Whether wrapped in red paper or packaged in a heart-shaped box, Valentine's Day gifts most often are given with the intent to inspire happiness, love and affection.

But area experts say some gestures actually can promote the gift of a healthy heart — physically and emotionally — through the promise of physical fitness opportunities, heart-healthy edibles, and tools for achieving tranquility and calm.

To get hearts pumping, a membership or gift certificate for cardiovascular fitness classes, such as martial arts training, can be the beginning of a new, heart-healthy lifestyle, said Gedo Chang, grandmaster and founder of Chang's Hapkido Academies in Naperville and Lombard.

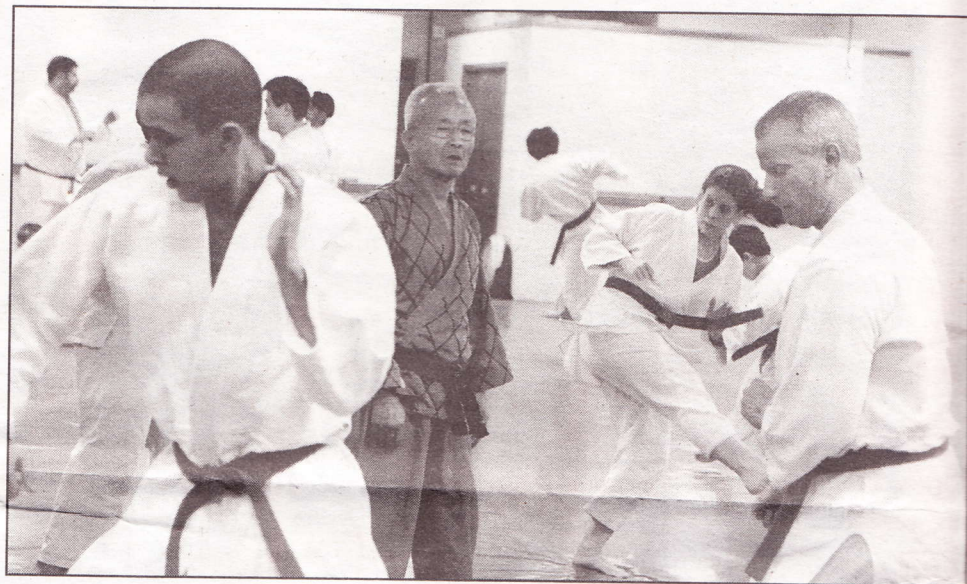
"The martial art of hapkido teaches peace of mind, which is a condition and state of being unrelated to external events, like the economy or other hardships. It's about how we interpret these external events," Chang said.

Focused on overcoming fear, anger, hatred and anxiety through self-discipline, the art also benefits cardiovascular health through physical training, Chang said. "Hapkido is based on meditative abdominal breathing, which significantly lowers blood pressure and pulse rate."

## Stress relief

Erica Tuttolomondo, athletic director and personal trainer at Rush-Copley Medical Center Healthplex in Aurora, said meditative breathing aspects of yoga are a great way to relieve stress, as is Pilates, flow yoga and other group classes.

"Our cardio classes, like boxing and ballet boot camp,



Terence Guider-Shaw / For The Sun

**Gedo Chang watches as students practice hapkido at Chang's Hapkido Academy in Naperville. Chang says hapkido is based on meditative abdominal breathing, which significantly lowers blood pressure and pulse rate.**

increase blood circulation by keeping the heart rate at a consistent heart rate zone for more than 20 minutes," Tuttolomondo said.

When the exertion of physical fitness routines calls for snacks, Nancy Rodriguez, dietitian at Edward Hospital in Naperville, recommends fruit as one heart-healthy option. She suggests a colorful and tasty fruit medley as a Valentine's Day gift sure to be well-received.

"Topping the list is berries, which are as beautiful as they are healthy," she said. "Antioxidants and phytochemicals offer benefits, including decreased risk of blood clots."

In addition, fruits (and vegetables) also are low in sodium and have high potassium content, shown as a positive factor in controlling blood pressure, according to Jo Lynn Worden, clinical nutrition manager at Rush-Copley Medical Center in Aurora.

## Dark dreams

Fresh strawberries covered in chocolate are particularly popular as a Valentine's Day treat, according to Judy Fisher, marketing manager for Cocoa Cabana in West Dundee.

"A lot of people like the contrast of the dark chocolate with the fresh fruit," she said.

Dark chocolate actually has benefits over milk chocolate, according to Worden.

"Cocoa is the basis of all things chocolate, and cocoa contains flavonols and antioxidants that are cardio-protective," Worden said, adding that flavonols keep blood platelets from sticking together, and antioxidants protect against free radical damage. "Cocoa is alkalized to improve flavor and lower bitterness. ... The darkest cocoa (chocolate) is higher in flavonols and antioxidants."

## And liquor is ...

Red wine also contains those compounds, Worden and Rodriguez said.

"Resveratrol is found in red wine and may prevent blood platelets from sticking together, and this may decrease clot formation," Worden said.

However, she emphasized that such benefits also could be influenced by diet and activity. "In general, the American Heart Association does not promote drinking alcohol (including red wine) for any protective benefits. ... Resveratrol can also be found in grapes and red grape juice."

For those comfortable working with that key ingredient — the red grape — Fox Valley Homebrew & Winery Supplies in down-

town Aurora offers patrons a wide range of California and international wine kit selections.

For ready-to-go reds, Top Shelf Wine & Spirits in South Elgin creates gift baskets and offers wine-tastings.

Red wine aside, massage and resonance energy gifts are other ways to reach for heart-healthy tranquility.

Tuttolomondo said massage offers stress reduction, improved blood circulation, lower blood pressure and other benefits.

Resonance energy, transferred through gemstones and crystals, leads to stress reduction and emotional well-being, explained Gary Lupton of Butterfly Turtle Gallery in St. Charles.

"Crystals and gemstones have properties to clear out negative energies and provide a sense of freedom and reduced stress when people hold one of the stones in each hand and meditate for 15-20 minutes of deep breathing," Lupton said.

The shop, which offers gemstone jewelry and crystal technologies, carries heart-shaped stones in time for Feb. 14, and the rose quartz is recognized for creating calming properties, said Lupton, adding, "It's also known to bring unconditional love."

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