



## Heart Health Starts Today

Promoting heart health isn't just for adults — the habits kids form now can support lifelong cardiovascular wellness, so this February is a great time to start some [heart healthy behaviors](#). A heart-healthy diet for children (and adults) includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and healthy fats, while limiting saturated fat, added sugar, and highly processed foods. In the spirit of keeping our hearts strong, the American Heart Association has a fun and kid-friendly recipe for the [Big Green Monster Smoothie](#), which is just as fun for the kids to help make as it is to drink.

Big Green Monster Smoothie

## What's Right when Washing my Produce?

Fresh fruits and vegetables are essential for kids' health, but they can harbor bacteria, fungi, or even trace pesticides when they travel from farm to fork. There are many confusing messages and products that are focused on special washing or rinsing techniques for produce, but here are some facts to clarify.

**Myth:** Pre-rinsing fruits and veggies before storing them keeps them

**Fact:** Washing before storage speeds up spoilage. It's best to rinse produce *right before* eating or preparing it.

**Myth:** Soap or produce wash gets food cleaner. **Fact:** Plain running water works best — soaps and detergents aren't safe for consumption and don't reduce germs more effectively.

**Myth:** If I'm peeling it, I don't need to wash it. **Fact:** Dirt or bacteria on the outside can transfer to the inside when you cut or peel.

**Myth:** Bagged lettuce and pre-washed produce still need extra washing. **Fact:** "Ready-to-eat" produce is already washed — additional rinsing isn't required and could introduce new bugs (just keep it separate from raw meats).

For more information and recommendations on how to properly prepare and store certain fruits and veggies, take a look at [this USDA info-sheet](#).

## Candy-Free Valentine Ideas

Valentine's Day is a sweet time for kids, but it should be about more than just chocolate and candy. Opting for candy-free goodies can be kinder for kids' nutrition, help avoid allergy concerns, and give classmates with dietary restrictions a tasty treat they can enjoy too. Balance is key; some candy on Valentine's Day is absolutely appropriate (kids deserve treats!), but giving variety — like some colored pencils, garden seeds, or mini puzzle — offers an opportunity for more memories and experiences. Need some more fun classroom ideas? Find a great list on [this blog post!](#)

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## About the author



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Abbie Hebron is a Registered Dietitian, specializing in pediatric nutrition (Certified Specialist in Pediatric Nutrition). She graduated with her Bachelor of Science in Dietetics from Missouri State University, and then attended the University of Rhode Island where she earned her master's degree. She is a member of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and was the recipient of South Carolina's Recognized Young Dietitian of the Year Award in 2022. In her free time, Abbie enjoys baking, traveling, hiking, and playing tennis with family and friends.

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