



Give yourself a Valentine

Have a happy holiday with a healthy heart

Valentine's Day is right around the corner, so I thought this would be a good time to review a holiday-themed website or mobile app. However, after spending way too many hours clicking through heart- and Cupid-bedazzled sites and apps — that were bathed in too much red and pink — I decided that love stinks.

Actually, love doesn't stink, but the virtual version represented by the majority of sites and apps I looked at is pretty bad.



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InSites

The sites aimed at young kids that feature games, arts and crafts are OK. And I'm sure the app for tweens that lets you test your kissing prowess by posting your lips to a picture of Justin Bieber on your cell phone is appreciated by some. I'm just not one of them. But the online Valentine's Day fare for adults is either too commercial, too sappy or too slutty.

Have a heart

I didn't want to be heartless and give up on the season of love though. So, while eating a chocolate heart I pilfered from a co-worker's desk, she informed me that February is also American Heart Month. It seems appropriate to learn about taking care of your heart while celebrating Valentine's Day. After all, if you don't take care of yourself, you can't take care of your loved ones.

The American Heart Association's (AHA) web site at Heart.org is a treasure trove of information on maintaining a healthy heart. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in America. In many cases it can be prevented with adjustments in what you eat and how physically active you are.

Like and how physically active you are. The AHA's site is also bathed in red and bedazzled with hearts. Unlike those sites, it's filled with substantive content.

Home is where the heart is

The home page is in need of a redesign, as it's too text heavy with no strong art elements. A small text alert across the top of the page informs viewers of any breaking heart-related

news. Below that are a series of tabs that link to inside sections on the site.

The main package on the page promotes the AHA's Go Red for Women campaign. It's an effort to raise awareness of the deadly toll heart disease exacts on women. There are links to resources for people who want to stage events, create websites or raise money for the cause. There's also a short video starring actress Elizabeth Banks portraying an unlikely victim of a heart attack.

A tabbed box in the middle of the page features heart-related news, popular topics and a nice interactive tool for exploring the site. A red tab on the box takes you to a page with the warning signs of a heart attack, stroke and cardiac arrest, and what to do if they're present.

The bottom of the page has a series of heart-health e-newsletters you can sign up for. There's also an inspirational story of how a family dealt with heart disease, and a section for donating to the AHA.

The heart of the matter

Once you start exploring the inside pages you'll discover the valuable information that makes this site so useful. There are many conditions and diseases related to the heart, and the AHA has resources for them all. Diabetes, hypertension, strokes, heart attacks and congenital defects are just a few of the topics covered.

Symptoms, treatment and prevention are addressed for the various ailments. There are also explanations of the causes and nature of them. Drug treatments are discussed with explanations of how the medications work and potential side effects. There's advice on diet and exercise techniques that can help prevent or control some conditions. Online tools, such as heart-healthy shopping lists and blood pressure charts, are available to help you manage your condition. CPR classes for medical professionals and educators are also offered. There's even an online shop.

While learning about heart health may not be the most romantic way to spend Valentine's Day, having a healthy heart will certainly help you pursue your romantic interests.

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