

VALENTINE'S DAY FOR SENIORS:

Celebrate Love at Any Age

Western cultures have been celebrating Valentine's Day as far back as the 14th century. In 18th century England, it evolved into an occasion to express love by presenting flowers, candies, and greeting cards known as "valentines."

Today, Valentine's Day means different things to different people. For new romantic interests and for long-married couples, it may remain a day to exchange tokens of affection like flowers, candy, or cards. But there are many more ways to show the people you care about how much they mean to you.

Especially for seniors who have lived long and full lives, love is not confined to just a romantic partner. It expands boundlessly to extended families, many friends, and even the acquaintances they interact with every day who make their lives happier. Even pictures and warm memories of loved ones who have passed can bring seniors a sense of joy and contentment.

"What we have once enjoyed we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us." - Helen Keller

Valentine's Day is our cultural reminder to enjoy a loving state of mind. Gratitude is one of the most important gateways to a loving state of mind. Even if you are not able to get out and about the way you used to, it's still easy to write a note or make a phone call to let someone know you appreciate them. Or it can be as simple as making a point to smile at everyone you see.

"Let us always meet each other with a smile, for the smile is the beginning of love." - Mother Teresa

Create more love and happiness

Everyone can experience senior love, whether you are married for decades, widowed, single, or dating. Biologically, the feeling of love is associated with a chemical our bodies produce called dopamine. There are several easy ways people can stimulate their production of dopamine and boost their moods with feelings of love.

Here are some ideas:

- **Do something out of the ordinary.** If you live near your family, make a date with your grandchildren to allow their parents to go out together. Plan a fun activity with family or friends, like playing cards or games, arts and crafts, sewing, or embroidery. Have a special movie night together on the couch with popcorn.

- **Make time to laugh.** Humor is a sure-fire way to improve your mood and raise dopamine levels. And laughter is contagious—making it a wonderful thing to enjoy with family and friends. Whether you go out to enjoy a comedy show, or stay in to watch your favorite funny movie or Abbott and Costello routine, laughter remains the best medicine to keep you feeling happy and loving life.
- **Listen to music.** Music helps us get through stressful times. It boosts our moods, entertains, and relaxes us. It brings back powerful loving memories and can make us more hopeful. One scientific study even showed that women who heard romantic music were two-times more likely to accept a date invitation! Whether you dance with your honey or just sit and enjoy, music can be a wonderful source of pleasure and loving connection with others.

Try new things

For a happy and loving state of mind, novelty is the spice of life. Especially for long-married couples, a Valentine's Day card or bouquet of flowers can be a welcome tradition, but shaking things up is sure to increase dopamine levels. Doing new things can be a wonderful way to keep senior love alive. Think about trying a new restaurant or meal together, taking a class you've never tried before, or exploring a town you're unfamiliar with.

Surprising your honey, family, or friends with a little act of kindness, special plans, or a token of affection is a wonderful way to keep people guessing and express your love. And the best part is, surprises are best when they happen all year long—not just on Valentine's Day