Last month, Valentine went through 31,000 sugar packets. That’s an average of more than 1,000 packets per day. Talk about a sugar high!

### How Much Are We Consuming?

Valentine goes through thousands of pounds of food everyday. Here’s a snapshot of our food usage during the month of November:

- 5,300 pounds of bananas
- 28,000 eggs
- 1,400 pounds of deli turkey
- 218 pounds of Honey Nut Cheerios
- 230 pounds of cucumbers
- 113 gallons of vanilla soft serve
- 700 loaves of whole wheat bread
- 6,000 pounds of cheese
- 1,000 gallons of 2% milk
- 750 pounds of apples
- 155 pounds of peanut butter
- 670 gallons of Powerade

Chew on that!

### Staying healthy during cold and flu season
Find out what you can do to keep your immune system at its best.

What about Echinacea? Does it really work when it comes to fighting off bugs?

### Food of the month
An ancient crop, this month’s food is packed with protein, minerals, and dietary fiber.

Recipe of the month
Try out this month’s featured food in a tasty, good-for-you recipe.
Staying Healthy During Cold and Flu Season
Follow these tips to keep your immune system functioning optimally:

We're all familiar with the trademark signs and symptoms – fever, muscle aches, fatigue, runny nose, headache – the list goes on. And most of us know at least one person who's already been affected by a cold or flu virus this year. So, is there anything we can do about it, or are we doomed to succumb to whatever arsenal we're attacked by? Fortunately, there are several preventative measures we can take to keep our immune systems running at their best.

Focus on fruits and vegetables – fruits and vegetables are teaming with a variety of substances that can boost immunity and help fight infection. As many of us are aware, fruits and vegetables contain ample amounts of vitamin C and beta-carotene – powerful antioxidants. Antioxidants are exactly what their name implies – substances that counteract oxidation, a process that can damage cells in the body, including those of the immune system. Fruits and vegetables also contain a variety of substances called polyphenols that act as antioxidants to protect the plants from diseases, UV light, and stress. Since we can't make these substances ourselves, it is important that we get them from foods. Flavonoids are polyphenols that are found primarily in the skins and peels of fruits and vegetables, so it's important to try to eat fruits and veggies with the skins on whenever possible. Ultimately, darker-colored fruits and vegetables are higher in all of these protective substances. So, load up on berries, dark leafy greens, broccoli and sweet potatoes.

Get adequate protein – protein is necessary for building many things in our bodies, including enzymes and antibodies – substances necessary for fighting off invaders. Without enough protein, we might be less equipped to stave off illness. So, make sure to include low fat, protein rich foods in your diet daily. Include foods like lean meats, fish, beans, nuts, and tofu.

Drink up – staying adequately hydrated keeps body temperature normal and helps to rid the body of wastes through urination, perspiration and bowel movements. Watch out for hidden sugar calories though – beverages like sports drinks, juices, and soda pack tons of sugar that most of us don't need. So, opt for water, or dilute 100% juices with at least half the amount in water.

Manage stress and get adequate sleep – both sleep deprivation and chronic stress can suppress the immune system in part through an increase in the stress hormone cortisol. Additionally, recent studies have shown that both those who were sleep-deprived and those who had higher levels of stress produced fewer antibodies to the flu vaccine than those that got adequate sleep and had lower levels of stress. Bottom line – try to get at least the recommended 7-9 hours of sleep a night, and practice relaxation techniques to avoid wearing your immune system down.

Exercise – studies show that regular, moderate exercise increases levels of leukocytes – immune system cells that fight infection. How much do you need? As little as 20 minutes a day, three times per week has been associated with increased immune function, and a brisk walk five days per week can help reduce your risk of catching a cold. What's more, exercise is also associated with an increase in endorphins – the feel-good hormones that increase well being and improve sleep quality, both of which can have positive impacts on the immune system.

What about Echinacea?
Many people swear by this herb as an immune booster. Echinacea is a member of the family of purple coneflowers, a plant native to eastern and central North America. In Europe and the U.S., extracts from this and other plants are used to prevent and treat the common cold. The big question is, does it really work?

To date, human studies show that Echinacea does not prevent rhinovirus (the main cold virus) or upper respiratory infections. However, if taken within the first 24 hours of the onset of symptoms, Echinacea has been shown to decrease the duration of cold symptoms.

When it comes to supplements like Echinacea, it is important to recognize that these substances are not regulated. Therefore, there is no guarantee that what the product advertises is actually what it contains. In a recent study of 59 brands of Echinacea, 48% were shown to have NO Echinacea whatsoever, and less than half met quality label standards.
Food of the Month: Quinoa

Quinoa (pronounced keen-wah) is an ancient grain-like crop native to South America. While it is relatively new to the U.S., quinoa has been cultivated in the Andean mountain regions of Chile, Peru and Bolivia for over 5,000 years. Quinoa has been a staple food in the diets of native Indians for thousands of years and was so highly valued that it was once considered “the gold of the Incas.”

Nutritional Value
Actually a seed, quinoa is amino acid rich, providing a high percentage of calories as protein. What’s more, the protein provided by quinoa is complete, which means it contains all 9 amino acids that our bodies are unable to synthesize themselves. Quinoa is also rich in vitamins and minerals, including manganese, magnesium, iron, copper, phosphorus, and B vitamins. The high mineral content of quinoa may help persons with migraines, cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Plus, quinoa is a good source of fiber—the stuff that makes you feel full, promotes regular bowel movements, and helps ward off chronic diseases like cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Get cookin’
Quinoa comes in two main varieties—white and red. It has a fluffy, creamy, slightly crunchy texture with a mild nutty flavor when cooked (be sure to rinse the seed thoroughly with water before cooking to remove the bitter saponins from its surface). Check out the recipe below for a tasty way to incorporate quinoa into your diet.

Recipe of the Month

Sweet and nutty quinoa

1/2 cup white quinoa, rinsed
1/2 cup red quinoa, rinsed
1 small onion, diced
1/2 medium apple, diced
1/2 cup fresh cranberries
1/4 cup pecans, coarsely chopped
2 Tbsp olive oil
1/2 tsp salt
1/2 tsp cinnamon
2 Tbsp maple syrup

Toast pecans in a small pan until fragrant, stirring frequently. Set aside. Put quinoa in a pot with 2 cups water and bring to a boil. Once boiling, cover, turn heat to low and simmer about 15 minutes or until liquid has evaporated. Meanwhile, saute onion and apple with salt in oil until onion is translucent. Add cranberries, cinnamon and pecans and saute another 3 minutes. Add mixture to quinoa with maple syrup and stir to combine. Add seasonings to taste.

Try this high fiber dish and experience the depth of flavor that quinoa has to offer. It’s a great protein alternative for vegetarians and vegans, and a tasty addition to anyone’s diet.