



Heart Disease and Diet

Did You Know?

Managing heart disease through diet and exercise is possible! Following a healthy diet may help you stay off or decrease the dosage of many medications.



The following tips are general dietary recommendations for the management and prevention of heart disease.

1. Consume a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole-grains.

- *Fruits and vegetables* are high in nutrients and low in calories, and eating a wide variety provides the body vitamins, minerals, fiber, and cancer-fighting antioxidants. It is important to choose fruits and vegetables with no added salt or sugar.

- Eating *whole-grains* can lower cholesterol levels and decrease risk for heart disease. Whole-grains, such as whole wheat bread, brown rice, quinoa, and whole wheat pasta, are minimally processed and have high amounts of nutrients. The American Heart Association recommends that at least half of all grains eaten should be whole-grains.

2. Limit foods and beverages with added sugar.

Added sweeteners, such as sucrose, corn syrup, and high-fructose corn syrup, can lead to increased calorie intake and weight gain. One way to reduce the amount of added sugar in the diet is by limiting foods with these sugars and avoiding sugary beverages.

3. Choose foods with low levels of salt (sodium).

Eating foods high in sodium can lead to high blood pressure, which is a risk factor for developing heart disease. Those who are African American, over the age of fifty, or have hypertension, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease, should have no more than 1,500 milligrams of sodium per day.

Most sodium in the diet comes from processed foods, including foods in packages and cans, as well as convenience foods eaten away from home. Be sure to read the “Nutrition Facts” label on prepared foods, and become familiar with nutrition information provided when dining out. At home, seasoning foods with fresh herbs and spices is a good substitute for salt in the foods you prepare.

4. Limit the amount of saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol in the diet.

Limiting the amount of unhealthy fats (saturated fats and trans fats) and cholesterol in the diet is an important step to lowering cholesterol levels and reducing the risk of developing heart disease.

The American Heart Association recommends the following guidelines:

- **Saturated fat:** Should be less than 7% of your daily calories, or less than 140 calories (16 grams) of saturated fat (on a 2000-calorie diet).
- **Trans fat:** Should be less than 1% of your daily calories, or less than 20 calories (2 grams) of saturated fat (on a 2000-calorie diet).
- **Cholesterol:** Should be less than 300 milligrams a day for healthy adults; less than 200 milligrams a day for adults with high cholesterol or heart disease.

Choose healthy monounsaturated fats, such as olive oil or canola oil, or polyunsaturated fats, from foods such as nuts and seeds. Choosing monounsaturated fats and polyunsaturated fats in place of saturated fats and trans fats can help to lower cholesterol levels.

Focus on Healthy Fats:

- **Use the “Nutrition Facts” label to locate** the necessary information to help make healthier choices. Read the label to find the amount of saturated and trans fats.
- **Choose lean cuts of meat.** Lean meat has less saturated fat than other cuts. Avoid processed meats, such as hot dogs and bacon. Add two servings of fish per week as an alternative to high-fat meats. Certain types of fish- like salmon and herring- are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which are linked to reduced risk of heart disease. In addition, substituting plant-based protein- such as beans and lentils- will reduce fat and cholesterol intake.
- **Cook and prepare meals in heart-healthy ways.** Use cooking styles that add little or no fat, such as grilling, broiling, or steaming. Use healthier fats such as oil and vinegar in place of creamy salad dressings, or low-fat substitutions like nonfat yogurt in place of sour cream. Buy white meat instead of dark meat, and trim off all visible fat.