

Healthy Eating: Eating Heart-Healthy Foods

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Overview

Heart disease is the number one killer of both men and women in the United States. If you are worried about heart disease, one of the most important things you can do is to start eating a heart-healthy diet. Changing your diet can help stop or even reverse heart disease.

At first, it may seem like there is a lot to learn. But you don't have to make these changes all at once. Start with small steps. Over time, making a number of small changes can add up to a big difference in your heart health.

To have a heart-healthy diet:

- Eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other high-fiber foods.
 - Choose foods that are low in saturated fat and trans fat.
 - Limit salt (sodium).
 - Stay at a healthy weight by balancing the calories you eat with your physical activity.
 - Eat at least two servings of fish each week. Oily fish, which contain omega-3 fatty acids, are best.
 - Limit drinks and foods with added sugar.
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How to eat a heart-healthy diet

To have a heart-healthy diet:

- **Eat fruits and vegetables.** Eat a variety of fruit and vegetable servings every day. Dark green, deep orange, and yellow fruits and vegetables are especially nutritious. Examples include spinach, carrots, peaches, and berries.
- **Eat a variety of grain products every day.** Include whole-grain foods that have lots of fiber and nutrients. Examples of whole grains include oats, whole wheat bread, and brown rice.
- **Eat fish at least 2 times each week.** Oily fish, which contain omega-3 fatty acids, are best for your heart. These fish include salmon, mackerel, lake trout, herring, and sardines.
- **Limit saturated fat.** To limit saturated fat, try to choose the following foods:
 - Lean meats and meat alternatives like beans or tofu
 - Fish, vegetables, beans, and nuts
 - Nonfat and low-fat dairy products
 - Polyunsaturated or monounsaturated fats, like canola and olive oils, to replace saturated fats, such as butter
- **Read food labels and limit the amount of trans fat you eat.** Trans fat raises the levels of LDL ("bad") cholesterol and also lowers high-density lipoprotein (HDL, or "good") cholesterol in the blood. Trans fat is found in many processed foods made with shortening or with partially hydrogenated or hydrogenated vegetable oils. These foods include cookies, crackers, chips, and many snack foods.
- **Choose healthy fats.** Unsaturated fats, such as olive, canola, corn, and sunflower oils, are part of a healthy diet. But all fats are high in calories, so watch your serving sizes.
- **Limit sodium.** For good health, less is best. This is especially important for people who are at risk for or already have high blood pressure. Try to limit how much sodium you eat to less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) a day. This can help lower your blood pressure. If you have high blood pressure and limit your sodium to 1,500 mg a day, you can lower your blood pressure even more. Choose and prepare foods with little or no salt. Watch for hidden sodium in foods.
- **Eat only as many calories as you need** to stay at a healthy weight. Learn how much is a serving, and then check your portion sizes. Limit drinks with added sugar. If you want to lose weight, increase your activity level to burn more calories than you eat.
- **If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation.** Limit alcohol intake to 2 drinks a day for men and 1 drink a day for women. See a picture of a standard drink (See figure 1 in appendix) .
- **Limit added sugar.** Limit drinks and foods with added sugar.
- When you are eating away from home, try to follow these heart-healthy diet tips.

You can get even more benefit from making diet changes if you also get plenty of exercise and don't smoke.

Start with small changes

But you don't have to be perfect, and you don't have to do it all at once. Make one or two changes at a time. As soon as you are used to those, make another one or two changes. Over time, making a number of small changes can add up and make a big difference in your health.

Here are some ideas about how to get started:

- Choose whole-grain bread instead of white bread.
- Have a piece of fruit instead of a candy bar.

- Try to eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day. Add one or two servings of fruits and vegetables to your day. Slowly add more servings until you are eating at least 5 servings a day.
- Switch from 2% or whole milk to 1% or nonfat milk.
- Instead of meat, have fish for dinner. Brush it with olive oil, and broil or grill it.
- Switch from butter to a cholesterol-lowering soft spread. Use olive or canola oil for cooking.
- Use herbs and spices, instead of salt, to add flavor to foods.
- Modify your favorite recipes so they have less fat and calories but still taste good.

It may take some time to get used to new tastes and habits, but don't give up. Keep in mind the good things you are doing for your heart and your overall health.

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Credits for Healthy Eating: Eating Heart-Healthy Foods

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Appendix

Topic Images

Figure 1

Standard Alcoholic Drink



Beer, wine, and hard liquor (distilled spirits) all contain alcohol. The following common alcoholic drinks contain equal amounts of alcohol and are often referred to as a drink or a standard drink:

- One mixed drink containing 1.5 fl oz (44 mL) of 80-proof hard liquor, such as gin, whiskey, or rum
- One 5 fl oz (148 mL) glass of wine
- One 12 fl oz (355 mL) bottle of beer or wine cooler

Proof is the amount of alcohol in hard liquor or distilled spirits. The percentage of pure alcohol in the hard liquor is usually one-half the proof. For example, a 100-proof liquor is about 50% pure alcohol. Thus, the higher the proof, the more pure alcohol the hard liquor contains.

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