

Healthy Heart Nutrition

Are you looking to improve your cardiovascular health and prevent heart disease? Heart disease is the leading killer in women and men. Every 34 seconds, one person in the United States dies from cardiovascular disease. You are not alone if you are unsure what to eat to keep your heart healthy. Genetic predisposition plays a role, but many things are in your control, including what you put on your plate. February is American Heart Month so learn which foods are healthiest for your heart.

Everyone should aim for a well-balanced diet. Your diet pattern is more important than specific foods. Your health and heart depend on your whole diet, not just the type of fat you eat, how much sodium is in your diet, or any other nutrient.

The best heart-healthy eating plan is the one you will follow. You do not need a diet. Instead, it would be best if you had a healthy lifestyle you can sustain for life.

You may have heard the phrase, “you are what you eat.” This is true when considering the effects of our foods on our heart health.

Follow these five tips for those trying to eat a more heart-healthy diet:

1. Eat more fruits and vegetables

Fruits and vegetables are good sources of vitamins and minerals. They are low in calories and rich in dietary fiber. Eating more vegetables and fruits may help you cut back on higher-calorie foods like cheese, meat, and snack foods. Choose more fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables, low-sodium canned vegetables, and fruit packed in juice or water. Keep fruits and vegetables washed and cut in your refrigerator or a fruit bowl in the kitchen so you remember to eat them! Another way to increase fruit and vegetable intake is to choose recipes that use them as the main ingredients.

2. Select whole grains

Whole grains contain fiber and other nutrients that regulate heart health and blood pressure. It is simple to increase the number of whole grains in a heart-healthy diet by substituting them for refined grain products. Be adventurous and try a new whole grain like farro, barley, or quinoa.

3. Limit unhealthy fats

Fat is a very important part of your diet to absorb the fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K and is a source of essential fatty acids. Some kinds of fat are healthier than others. In general, unsaturated fats (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated) from avocados, olive oil, nuts, and seeds are the healthy fats we want to include in our diet in moderation. On the other hand, saturated and trans fats are unhealthy for the heart. Many saturated fats come from animal sources like poultry, red meat, and dairy.

4. Choose low-fat protein sources

Lean meat, poultry, low-fat dairy products, fish, and eggs should be some of your best protein sources. Certain types of fish (salmon, cod, and tuna) are rich in fatty acids known as omega-3, which can lower blood fats called triglycerides.

Legumes, like beans, peas, and lentils, are good protein sources and contain less fat and no cholesterol, making them suitable substitutes for meat.

5. Avoid processed food

Processed food is technically any food altered from its original state, but not all processed foods are bad for you. Fresh blueberries, roasted nuts, and cut vegetables are minimally processed but are prepped for convenience. Ready-to-eat foods like chips, crackers, and deli meat are more heavily processed. Some of the most heavily processed food are premade meals, like frozen pizza and microwaveable dinners. Eating processed foods on occasion is fine.

Protect your heart. Following a nutritious diet low in foods and beverages linked to poor heart health and increased cardiovascular disease risk is one of the most important ways to keep your cardiovascular system healthy.

(Sources: www.cdc.gov; www.dietaryguidelines.gov; <https://www.heart.org>)