

Heart-Healthy Eating

The leading cause of death in the U.S. every year is heart disease; by modifying what you eat, you can reduce your risk. A healthy diet has been proven to positively affect your blood pressure, weight, cholesterol, and diabetes; all are controllable risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

Making nutritious and heart-healthy meals is not complicated. Try these tips for preparing heart-healthy meals.

1. Choose healthier types of fat

Use small amounts (no more than one teaspoon) of oils such as olive and canola in recipes and for sautéing.

Eat healthier fats like raw nuts, olive oil, fish oils, flaxseeds, and avocados.

Limit saturated fats to no more than 10% of your daily calorie intake. Saturated fats are mainly found in tropical dairy, oils, and red meat.

Enjoy lower-fat dairy products in moderation. Consider switching to lower-fat cheeses.

Select leaner beef and pork cuts, especially with “round” or “loin” in their name, and drain the fat off cooked ground meat. Eat fewer processed meats that are high in saturated fat, such as hot dogs, bacon, and salami. Purchase and remove the skin before eating or buy skinless poultry.

Vary the protein sources in your diet. Opt for fish, skinless chicken, eggs, and vegetarian protein sources.

2. Use healthier cooking techniques

Healthily preparing ingredients is just as important as choosing healthy ingredients. You can broil, bake, roast, poach, steam, sauté, or lightly stir fry ingredients using a small amount of reduced sodium broth, olive oil, and spices instead of salt. Try different ways of cooking foods to add variety.

3. Eat more omega-3 fatty acids

Eat omega-3 fatty acids daily from fish such as trout, salmon, or herring or from flaxseed, spinach, kale, or walnuts.

Add walnuts to salads, cereal, oatmeal, or muffins. Try walnut oil in salad dressings.

Eat two 4-ounce servings of fatty fish weekly, including canned light tuna (in water), salmon, lake trout, sardines, and mackerel. When purchasing salmon, instead of farmed, select wild.

Choose omega-3 eggs. In enriched eggs, the amount of omega-3 varies considerably from around 100 to 500 mg per egg, so check the label.

4. Increase dietary fiber

Include more plant-based protein sources in meals prepared at home, such as tempeh (soy), beans, lentils, seeds, and nuts.

Make half your plate full of fruits and vegetables at each meal.

Instead of 100% fruit juice, eat whole fruits and vegetables. Removing the peels on produce, like potatoes and apples, lowers their fiber content, so eat the peel!

Choose whole grains instead of refined grains. Eat more high-fiber cereals, breads, and pasta made from whole grains or legumes.

5. Lower salt intake

Prepare meals at home more often to control the amount of salt when cooking. Use salt sparingly while cooking. For most recipes, you can cut at least half the salt.

Be mindful when adding higher-sodium condiments to food at the table, like pickles, soy sauce, ketchup, and olives.

Season foods with garlic, onions, herbs, spices, peppers, and lime or lemon juice to add flavor.

Whether you have high cholesterol or high blood pressure, have already been diagnosed with heart disease, or are looking to improve your cardiovascular health, these heart-healthy tips can help you lower your risk of a heart attack and manage these conditions.