

# Healthy Eating With Heart Disease

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Heart disease tops the list as America's most deadly disease. It strikes about 82 percent of people age 65 or older. Your diet, though, can play a critical role in reducing your risks and helping get you back on the road to wellness if you already have heart disease.

Studies support this fact. In people ages 70 to 90, eating a heart-friendly diet rich in wholesome carbs and healthy fats (along with increased exercise) is associated with a 65 percent to 73 percent lower rate of death from all chronic disease, including heart disease.

Foods full of unhealthy fats and sugars can cause inflammation and plaque buildup in your arteries, a ripe recipe for a heart attack or stroke. The right diet can help keep your arteries clear and work to cut your risk. And check with your doctor to find out what activity level is right for you.

## Healthy eating guidelines

A prescription for a heart-healthy diet does not mean a lifetime of bland food and skinless chicken. Check out the general guidelines below. Ask your doctor for specific guidelines depending on your individual health.

**Increase wholesome carbs.** Healthy carbs are loaded with fiber and protective nutrients, and include:

- **Fruits and vegetables.** Strive for variety for the most benefit.
- **Whole grains** such as whole wheat, oatmeal, brown and wild rice, barley, buckwheat, bulgur and quinoa are all great choices.
- **Beans/legumes** such as split peas and lentils, pinto, navy, kidney, black and garbanzo beans are rich in lean protein, too.

**Focus on lean proteins.** These can take the place of fatty meats and cheeses.

- **Fish, skinless poultry, lean meats, dry beans, limited eggs and nuts** can stand in for fatty meats and cheeses.
- **Low-fat dairy** can be found in fat-free or low-fat versions of milk, cheese, yogurt, cottage cheese and other milk products.

**Increase healthy fats.** The right fats can actually be good for you. Certain poly- and monounsaturated fats can make up to 30 percent of your total calories. Use them to replace saturated and trans fats.

- **Olive and canola oil** can be used in cooking and baking.
- **Nuts and seeds** are great as snacks or tossed into cereal or yogurt.
- **Avocado** is delicious as a sandwich spread or chopped into salads.
- **Fatty fish** such as salmon, mackerel, sardines and herring are recommended at least twice a week.

If you have heart disease, talk to your doctor about taking an omega-3 fish oil supplement.

**Keep saturated fats to less than 7 percent of total calories.** This includes fatty cuts of meat, whole milk, cheese made from whole milk, ice cream, butter, lard, cakes, cookies, doughnuts, sausage, mayonnaise, coconut and palm oil.

**Limit trans fats and partially hydrogenated fat** to less than 1 percent of total calories. These fats are thought to be even more dangerous than cholesterol and saturated fat. They are found mainly in processed foods such as cakes, cookies, crackers, pies, stick margarine and various chips.

**Limit cholesterol to less than 300 mg per day.** Cholesterol is found only in animal foods such as eggs, meat, poultry and fish.

**Reduce added sugars.** Excess sugar has been shown to have a role in heart disease, along with "bad" fats.

- Closely watch your intake of sweets and sweetened drinks.
- Read labels for hidden sources of sugar such as corn syrup, fructose, glucose, sucrose, dextrose, maltose, honey, molasses and malt syrup.

**Reduce sodium to less than 2,000 mg per day.** Read labels on all canned and processed foods. Watch intake of cured and processed meats and cheese.

#### **Other considerations**

**Alcohol.** If you do drink, keep your intake to no more than 5 ounces of wine daily for women and 10 ounces for men. Any more than this can increase the risk of health problems, including certain types of cancer.

**Plant stanols/sterols.** Plant sterols and stanols are substances that occur naturally in small amounts in many plant foods. Two grams taken every day has been shown to lower LDL cholesterol by up to 15 percent. You can now get stanols or sterols in some margarine spreads, orange juice, cereals and even granola bars. They can also be found in gel form as a supplement. Ask your doctor if taking plant stanols/sterols is right for you.