

Healthy Eating: How to Eat a Heart-Healthy Diet



A heart-healthy diet has lots of vegetables, fruits, nuts, dried beans, and whole grains, and is low in sodium. It limits foods that are high in saturated fats.

Start with small steps. Over time, you can make a number of small changes to make a big difference in your heart health.

How can you start eating a more heart-healthy diet?

Start by making a few of these changes at a time.

- Learn what a serving size is. Make sure that you are not eating larger portions than are recommended. For example, a serving of meat is 2 to 3 ounces; a 3-ounce serving is about the size of a deck of cards.
- Measure serving sizes until you are good at "eyeballing" them. Keep in mind that restaurants often serve portions that are 2 to 3 times the size of a single serving.

Eat more fruits and vegetables

- Fruits and vegetables have lots of nutrients that help protect against heart disease, and they have little—if any—fat.
- Keep veggies like cherry tomatoes, bell peppers, and carrots handy for snacks. Buy fruit that is in season, and store it where you can see it so that you will be tempted to eat it.
- Cook dishes that have a lot of veggies in them, such as stir-fries and soups.

Limit saturated fats

- Read food labels. Limit saturated fats. Foods that are high in saturated fat include meats, cheeses, and fried foods. Saturated fat is also found in coconut oil, palm oil, and cocoa butter.
- Use healthy fats such as olive or canola oil when you cook.
- Bake, broil, grill, or steam foods instead of frying them.
- Eat fish, skinless poultry, and soy products such as tofu instead of high-fat meats.
- Limit the amount of high-fat meats you eat, including hot dogs and sausages. Cut off all visible fat when you prepare meat.
- Choose nonfat or low-fat dairy products.

Eat foods high in fiber

- Foods high in soluble fiber may reduce your cholesterol and provide important vitamins and minerals. A variety of foods have soluble fiber. These include barley, oatmeal, rye, dried beans, seeds, fruit, and vegetables.

- Eat a variety of grain products every day. Buy whole-grain breads and cereals, instead of white bread or pastries. Look for foods that have at least 2 grams of fiber in each serving and list whole wheat flour or other whole-grain flour as the first ingredient.

Limit sodium

- 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.
- Taste food before you salt it. Add only a little salt when you think you need it. With time, you will adjust to less salt.
- Eat fewer snack items, fast foods, and other high-sodium, processed foods. Check food labels for the amount of sodium in packaged foods.

- Choose low-sodium versions of canned goods, such as soups, vegetables, and beans. Or better yet, eat fresh or frozen vegetables instead.
- Do not cook with salt. Use herbs for seasoning instead.
- Compare sodium in foods like soup, bread, and frozen meals—and choose the foods with lower numbers.

Limit alcohol

- Limit alcohol to no more than 2 drinks a day for men and 1 drink a day for women. Too much alcohol can cause a variety of health problems.

Limit sugar

- Limit foods and drinks with added sugar. These include candy, desserts, and soda pop.

Go to www.ChooseMyPlate.gov for more tips.