



Nutrition for a Healthy Heart

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Heart-Healthy Eating: Who needs it? YOU do!

The building blocks of good nutrition are the same for everyone. You may have specific nutrition goals for conditions such as diabetes, heart failure, or high blood pressure. But, the basics of good nutrition do not change.

A healthy diet is one of the best things you can do for your heart. Heart-healthy eating should be creative and fun. This booklet will help you learn about heart-healthy eating and how to make it easy and enjoyable. Heart-healthy eating can help you live a healthier life over all.

As you read, keep in mind that your registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) will provide instructions that are unique to you and your tastes. If your instructions are different from what's in this booklet, always follow what your care team recommends.



Healthy Eating



Referrals for an RDN

Your healthcare providers may ask you to see a **Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN)**.

An RDN will teach you about nutrition, help you make healthy changes in your food choices, plan menus, support you in your changes, and follow your progress.

Healthy eating is important for everyone at every stage of life. If you have certain heart risk factors, it is especially important to follow the healthy eating guidelines in this book.

What are cardiac risk factors?

Cardiac **risk factors** are things that increase your chance of developing coronary disease or heart disease. The major cardiac risk factors can be divided into 2 groups:

- **Risk factors you cannot change.** These include age, sex, family history of heart disease, and a personal history of heart problems.
- **Risk factors you can change.** These include:
 - What you choose to eat and drink
 - Medical conditions like high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, high blood glucose (sugar), inflammation, prediabetes, or diabetes
 - Smoking
 - How much you move your body
 - Overweight and obesity
 - Sleep habits
 - Stress management

How can healthy eating help?

Healthy eating can help you control or improve major cardiac risk factors by:

- Improving your blood cholesterol (LDL, HDL) and triglycerides
- Losing excess weight
- Controlling blood sugar and diabetes
- Lowering your blood pressure
- Decreasing inflammation

A healthy diet can help heart, blood pressure, or cholesterol medicines work better (when taken routinely) and with fewer side effects.

Healthy eating helps you feel better! You'll have more energy, more restful sleep, and improved digestion. Feeling better makes any treatment or prevention plan more effective.

About cholesterol

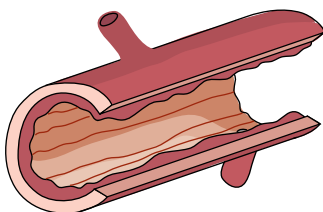
Cholesterol is a substance found in all body cells. Your body needs it to function normally. Your liver makes cholesterol and certain foods can raise it (for example, foods that come from animals, such as red meat and full-fat dairy products). High levels of cholesterol in your blood can cause coronary artery disease.

Your healthcare provider will test your blood for:

- **LDL (bad) cholesterol, total cholesterol, triglycerides.** High levels of LDL indicate increased risk of heart disease and stroke.
- **hs-CRP (C-Reactive Protein)** is a measure of inflammation. It can be increased with high levels of LDL. High levels of hs-CRP indicate increased risk of heart disease and stroke.
- **HDL (good) cholesterol** helps prevent extra cholesterol from building up. Low levels of HDL indicate increased risk of heart disease and stroke.

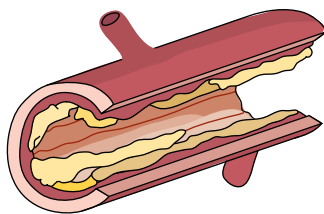
Healthy artery

A smooth, flexible artery carries blood efficiently to your heart.



Unhealthy artery

Cholesterol, fat, and other materials narrow the artery and limit blood flow. This puts you at risk of heart attack or stroke.



About diabetes and pre-diabetes

Diabetes is a disease that causes your blood glucose (sugar) levels to be too high. Diabetes can damage your blood vessels and increase your risk for heart attack, stroke, and other health problems.

If your blood glucose levels are moderately high, you may have a condition called prediabetes. If you have prediabetes, now is the perfect time to get your blood glucose under control through changes in your diet. If you are overweight, the best way to start losing weight is with diet and exercise.



“When I went to see my doctor, he said my cholesterol was pretty high. That surprised me, because I’m not overweight and I’m in decent shape. But my doctor explained the risks, so I took it seriously.

Changing what I eat was the hardest for me, but my wife helps. She’s always trying out new recipes, and serving lots of vegetables and fruit. And I’ve gotten really good at reading food labels. You have to watch out. The numbers on the labels are just for one serving, not for the whole package. So when you start to add it up, you can see that you’re getting way too much fat and salt. Anyway, my reward is seeing how healthier eating makes a difference. With medicine and a good diet, my cholesterol is down quite a bit.”

— Gordon,
diagnosed with
high cholesterol

Building Blocks

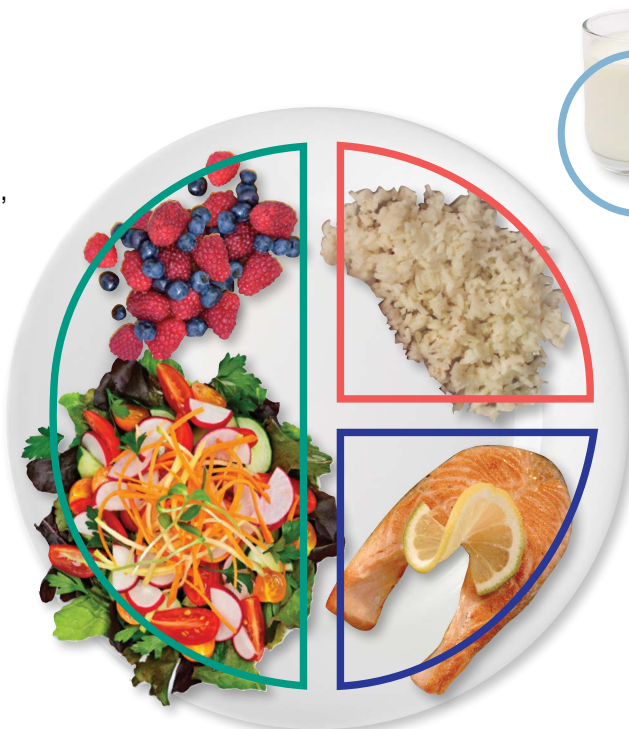
How can you get the right balance of nutrients, maintain a healthy weight, and support your heart health? While healthy eating does not look exactly the same for everyone, decades of research have consistently shown that six key building blocks of nutrition are strongly linked to better heart health and overall well-being.

1

Eat fruits and vegetables.

In fact, in a typical meal, half of your plate will be filled with vegetables and fruits.

(See [page 7](#).)



2

Choose whole and unprocessed grains

Grains and starches together will fill about $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate for most meals.

(See [page 9](#).)



3

Choose heart-healthy proteins.

A healthy portion will take up about $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate.

(See [page 11](#).)



4

Choose unsaturated fats and oils.

(See [page 14](#).)



5

Choose low-fat dairy products or dairy alternatives.

(See [page 17](#).)



6

Limit your sodium (salt), sugar, and alcohol.

(See [page 19](#).)



Building Block 1: Eat more fruits and vegetables

TIPS

Here are a few tips for getting enough fruits and vegetables in your daily diet — and for getting the most benefit from them.

To help you eat enough fruits and vegetables:

- Top a bowl of whole grain cereal with sliced bananas or berries each morning.
- Make a fruit smoothie with frozen bananas and berries, a handful of spinach or greens, and low fat plain yogurt.
- Keep your freezer well stocked with frozen vegetable combinations. Cook them with a healthy protein source for a quick stir-fry lunch or dinner.
- Keep a fruit basket instead of a candy dish at your desk.
- Choose restaurants that offer fruits and vegetables as sides.
- Keep prewashed fruits and vegetables in the refrigerator already prepared to make quick sides and snacks
- Use dried fruit as a quick snack or as a topping for cereal, salad, or yogurt.

*Dark green, leafy vegetables are high in vitamin K, which may interfere with anticoagulant medicines such as warfarin (Coumadin). If you take an anticoagulant (sometimes called a blood thinner), be consistent about how many vitamin K-rich foods you eat. For example, if you ate 4 salads a week before starting your anticoagulant, keep eating 4 salads a week. Ask your healthcare providers for more information.

Do not eat grapefruit and grapefruit juice while taking blood pressure or cholesterol lowering medicines unless your doctor says it's okay.

To get the most out of each serving:

- Choose whole fruits more often than fruit juices. Whole fruits are higher in fiber.
- For more fiber, leave the peel or skin on fruits and vegetables where appropriate.
- Select fruits and fruit juices without added sweeteners or syrups.
- Choose fresh or frozen vegetables without added sauces, fats, or salts.
- Steer clear of deep-fried vegetables or vegetables smothered in butter or cream sauce.
- Eat more dark green and deep yellow or orange vegetables. These vegetables tend to be the most nutrient-rich.*

TARGETS

To make sure you're eating enough fruits and vegetables, aim for the following:

- Eat 3 to 4 servings (about 1½ to 2 cups total) of fruit each day
- Eat 3 to 5 servings (about 1½ to 2½ cups total) of vegetables each day.

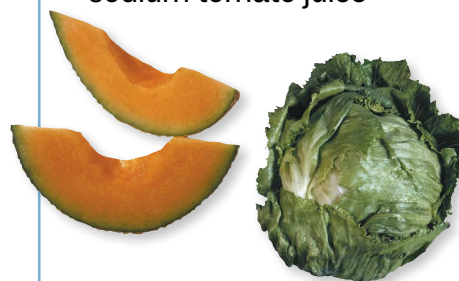
Sample servings (portions)

Fruits

- 1 small piece of fruit (orange, apple, kiwi, plum, peach, pear, or nectarine)
- ½ medium banana
- 1 cup melon
- ¾ cup to 1 cup berries
- ½ cup unsweetened juice
- 2 tablespoons dried fruit

Vegetables

- 1 cup raw vegetables
- 1 cup leafy green vegetables
- ½ cup cooked vegetables
- ½ cup vegetable or low sodium tomato juice





Top antioxidant foods

These foods have the most antioxidants per serving:

- Dark green leafy vegetables (kale, collard greens, spinach, arugula)
- Kidney beans, pinto beans, black beans, and red beans
- Blueberries, blackberries, cranberries, raspberries, strawberries, cherries, papaya, goji berries
- Artichokes
- Prunes and plums
- Walnuts, pecans, and brazil nuts
- Apples

Spices such as cocoa, cinnamon, cloves, turmeric, cilantro, and oregano are also rich in antioxidants.

Eat lots of fruits and vegetables

It's probably no surprise to hear that eating a variety of fruits and vegetables is good for your overall health. But did you know that they're especially good for your heart? Here's why:

- Fruits and vegetables can be a great source of soluble fiber (see page 10 for good food sources). Studies show that soluble fiber can lower blood cholesterol levels.
- Fruits and vegetables provide antioxidants such as vitamin C, vitamin E, beta-carotene, lycopene, lutein, and quercetin. Antioxidants protect against heart disease. Studies show that foods higher in antioxidants (see the list at right) work better than supplements (vitamin pills) to promote heart health.
- Fruits and vegetables are an important source of minerals such as calcium, potassium, and magnesium. These minerals can help lower blood pressure and keep your electrolytes in proper balance.
- Many fruits and vegetables contain flavonoids, a kind of plant nutrient (phytonutrient) that can aid heart health. The best sources of flavonoids are:
 - Red, blue, and purple fruits, such as berries, apples, and red or purple grapes
 - Tomatoes, broccoli, carrots, and onions
 - Soybeans and other legumes
 - Kale and parsley
 - White, green, or oolong teas

Red foods to the rescue

Research has shown that one particular antioxidant — lycopene — has anti-inflammatory effects. Reducing inflammation reduces the risk of heart disease and aids in the prevention of cardiovascular disease. Lycopene gives certain foods a red color. To help your heart, eat more of these red, lycopene-rich foods:



- Tomatoes, tomato juice, tomato soup, canned tomatoes
- Watermelon
- Strawberries
- Pink grapefruit

Building Block 2: Eat more whole grains

TIPS

Here are tips for getting more whole grains in your daily diet.”

To get the most out of each serving:

Read food labels. Although whole grain foods are usually darker and crunchier than refined foods, you can't always identify them by color and texture. Beware of front labels making claims like “multigrain,” or “made with 100% wheat.” These claims can be misleading. Instead, check the ingredient list for the word “whole” (for example, “whole grain” or “whole oats”). See page 24 for more information on reading food labels.

- Find cookbooks or recipes that emphasize whole grains.
- Use a pressure cooker to cook whole grains more quickly. Whole grains take longer to cook than processed grains.
- Watch out for “tag-along trouble.” Many whole grain snacks and cereals are high in sugar and fat. Read food labels carefully. Steer clear of grain products made with hydrogenated fats, which contain harmful trans fats.
- Experiment with legumes. Try lentils, navy beans, chickpeas (garbanzo beans), white beans, Anasazi beans, and black beans.
- Try whole grain products you haven't tried before:
 - Amaranth topped with your favorite tomato-based sauce
 - Barley in soups, stews, or as a side dish
 - Bulgur as a hot cereal or in tabouli salad
 - Whole cornmeal or polenta served as a hot cereal
 - Whole wheat couscous flavored with raisins, almonds, cinnamon, and ginger for dessert
 - Cracked wheat in whole grain cereals or whole wheat berries
 - Kashi used as a pilaf or hot cereal
 - Millet cooked as a hot cereal or pilaf
 - Quinoa served as a pilaf or in chili (be sure to rinse quinoa before cooking)

TARGETS

Aim for 5 to 6 servings (about 5 to 6 ounces total) of grain and other starches every day. Try to make at least half of the servings whole grains.

Sample servings (portions)

- 1 slice (1 ounce) of 100 % whole grain bread
- 1/3 cup cooked brown rice, bulgur, barley, millet, or quinoa
- 1/2 cup whole grain cereal or cooked oatmeal
- 1/3 cup cooked whole wheat pasta or whole wheat couscous
- 1/4 large baked potato
- 1/2 cup sweet potato
- 7 to 15 whole grain crackers
- 3 cups air-popped popcorn
- 1/2 cup corn





Refined grains: The less healthy choice

Refined (or processed) grains have had the bran and often the germ removed from the grain, stripping away fiber and many other important nutrients. Although some nutrients are added back in when refined grain is fortified, not all of them are replaced.

That's why refined foods like white bread, white pasta, white rolls or buns are less nutritious choices. They are lower in fiber and nutrition, rapidly absorbed, increase triglyceride levels, and give you only short-lived energy.

Eat more whole grains

Foods like bread, rice, and pasta are a key ingredient in diets all over the world. But as with other foods, some grains and starches are better for your heart than others.

Whole grains and other unprocessed starches: The healthiest choice

Whole grain foods include all parts of the grain kernel (the bran, the germ, and the endosperm). Whole grains and other unprocessed starches are far better for your heart than refined foods, because they provide more of the following:

- **Dietary fiber.** Studies have linked high-fiber diets to reduced risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer, obesity, and type 2 diabetes.
- **Complex carbohydrates.** Compared to the carbohydrates provided by white bread, and other processed foods, whole grains give you longer-lasting energy, more fiber, and more nutrients.
- **Vitamins and minerals.** Whole grains are rich in heart-healthy nutrients like the B vitamins, vitamin E, folate (folic acid), and minerals like magnesium, copper, iron, selenium, and zinc.

Whole grains include: Whole wheat cereals, pastas, couscous, and quinoa, as well as oats and brown or wild rice, are a few examples of whole grains.

Unprocessed starches: Beans and vegetables, such as whole white and sweet potatoes, acorn, butternut, or spaghetti squash, peas, and corn, are good examples. When simply prepared with little or no fat, and eaten with the skin on (if appropriate), these starchy vegetables provide even more fiber and other nutrients.



Fiber facts

There are 2 main types of dietary fiber: soluble and insoluble. Both types are important in your diet — but soluble fiber has special benefits for your heart health. Research shows that it can lower LDL cholesterol levels.

Guidelines recommend eating a minimum of 25 – 38 grams of fiber daily (see table at right). Soluble fiber (see * below) is especially important for lowering LDL cholesterol.

The following foods are good sources of fiber:

- Whole wheat cold cereals
- *Oatmeal, steel cut or whole oats, oat bran
- Whole rye, barley, buckwheat, bulgur, farro, millet, triticale, sorghum, and spelt
- Brown, black, and wild rice
- *Psyllium [sihl-lee-uhm] husk or seeds, found in some bran cereals and in fiber supplements
- *Legumes, such as split peas, cooked dried beans, lentils, and edamame
- Nuts
- *Pectin, found in fruits such as apples, oranges, pears, prunes, apricots, blackberries, passion fruit, figs, and mangos
- Vegetables, especially broccoli, Brussels sprouts, carrots, artichokes, winter squash, turnips, asparagus, and avocado
- Sweet potatoes
- *Ground flax and chia seeds
- Whole wheat pasta and couscous

Age	Female	Male
1 to 3	14 g	14 g
4 to 8	17 g	20 g
9 to 13	22 g	25 g
14 to 18	25 g	31 g
19 to 30	28 g	34 g
31+	25 g	31 g



Building Block 3: Choose heart-healthy proteins

A good day for heart-healthy proteins

The notes below show how you can eat healthy proteins from a variety of sources all day long:

For breakfast:

- Try scrambled tofu or an egg with fresh, chopped vegetables and herbs.
- Serve a high-protein fruit smoothie by blending silken tofu or plain Greek yogurt with frozen berries and bananas and raw nuts.
- Spread 1 tablespoon of natural peanut butter on toasted whole grain bread. Top with sliced bananas and a sprinkle of sunflower seeds.
- Add 1 serving of toasted nuts and/or seeds to any whole-grain cold or hot breakfast cereal.



For lunch and dinner:

- Choose a cottage-cheese-and-fruit plate for an easy light meal.
- Use flavored, baked tofu in stir-fry dishes.
- Turn an ordinary salad into a high-protein meal by topping it with grilled chicken, tuna or salmon, kidney beans, garbanzo beans, or black beans.
- Add a sprinkle of sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, or slivered almonds for added protein and crunch.
- Use lean cuts of thinly sliced turkey for sandwiches on whole grain bread.
- Experiment with different kinds of bean soups or chili, using navy or black beans.

For snacks:

- Choose nuts or seeds instead of pretzels or chips.
- Serve hummus with pita strips for a great appetizer.
- Low-fat refried beans mixed with a touch of fresh salsa make a great bean dip. Serve with baked tortilla chips as a quick and healthy snack.
- Steamed soybeans (edamame) make a terrific high-protein snack. (Remember to remove the pod.)



TARGETS

Eat 2 to 3 servings (about 4 to 6 ounces total) of heart-healthy protein daily. Get your protein from a variety of sources.

Sample servings (portions)

- 3 ounces fish, white-meat poultry (skin removed), or extra-lean meat
- 1 tablespoon peanut butter or other nut butter such as almond or soy butter
- ½ cup steamed soybeans (edamame) with pods removed
- ½ cup tofu or tempeh
- 1 egg or 2 egg whites
- ½ cup cooked beans, peas, or lentils
- 1 ounce raw nuts or peanuts
- ¼ cup low-fat cottage cheese
- 1 ounce seeds

TIPS

Here are some tips for a protein-rich, heart-healthy diet:

- **Limit processed meats.** Foods such as hot dogs, bacon, sausage, pepperoni, salami, and other lunch meats are usually high in fat and sodium.
- **Watch your portion sizes.** Stick to portions that are about the size of a deck of cards or the palm of your hand (not including your fingers). If it's bigger than that, it's more than one portion.
- **Experiment with meatless recipes.** Try adding beans, low-fat cheese, or tofu to your favorite recipes.
- **Check out a vegetarian cookbook** for new tasty, filling, and easy-to-prepare meals.





How much dietary cholesterol?

Dietary cholesterol is found only in foods that come from animals, including meats, fish (especially shellfish), high-fat dairy products (such as whole and 2% milk, cheese, and butter), egg yolks, and organ meat.

You need cholesterol for your body to function normally. But many foods that come from animals also have high amounts of saturated fats. It's best to limit the amount of these foods so that you don't increase your risk for heart disease (atherosclerosis).

Note: Many of these food products do not come with nutrition labels. Some product labels say the item is “low cholesterol” when the food item didn't contain cholesterol to begin with.

Choose heart-healthy proteins

Protein is an important part of a healthy diet. Protein helps repair body tissues and build muscles—including your heart muscle. Unfortunately, many sources of protein are high in saturated fat. How can you meet your protein needs AND lower cardiac risk factors at the same time? The trick is getting your protein from the right sources.

This information will help you choose proteins from both animal and plant sources that are low in saturated fat and trans fat. Many of these sources of protein also provide additional nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids and fiber.

Heart-healthy animal proteins

- **Fish and shellfish:** Fish and shellfish are good sources of protein and are lower in saturated fat than other animal proteins. In addition, several varieties of fish — such as halibut, salmon, trout, and sardines — are also rich in omega-3 fatty acids.
- **Poultry:** Skinless, white meat of poultry (such as chicken and turkey breasts) are all good sources of lean protein. Watch out for poultry such as duck and goose, which are higher in fat.
- **Eggs:** Eggs can be part of a heart healthy diet when eaten in moderation. Although the 2026 Dietary Guidelines say that dietary cholesterol is no longer a nutrient for concern, it may be appropriate for those with elevated LDL to eat fewer egg yolks (180 mg per egg).

Fish and seafood

People who eat seafood often have lower rates of heart disease. The American Heart Association recommends eating 3½ ounces cooked or ¾ cup flaked oily fish at least 2 times a week. Good examples include:

- Lake trout
- Salmon
- Sardines
- Albacore
- Herring
- Tuna
- Oysters
- Halibut

Fish and seafood, continued

Taking fish oil pills rich in omega-3 fatty acids does not appear to lower risk of heart attack or stroke. Eating fish is a better choice. Take fish oil pills only when recommended by your dietitian or healthcare provider.

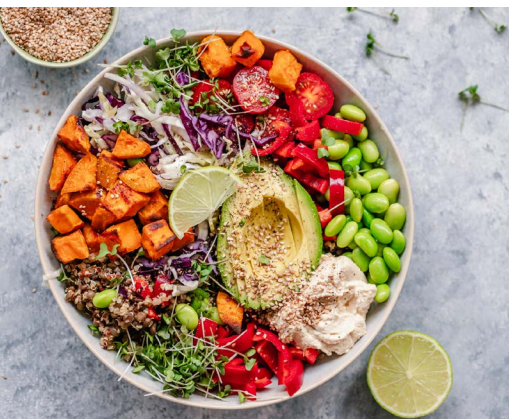
Note: Mercury is increasingly common in many sea fish. To reduce harmful effects of environmental pollution, avoid eating shark, king mackerel, or tilefish. Eat a variety of fish (fresh, frozen, or canned).

Red meat

While red meats are excellent protein sources, choosing leaner cuts makes it easier to keep overall saturated fat intake below 10% of total calories.:

- Lean beef (“choice” or “select” grade)
 - Sirloin tip roast
 - Steak (top sirloin)
- Round or flank (example: round roast or side steak)
 - Tenderloin rump
- Extra lean ground hamburger, ground round (97% fat free)
- Lean pork
 - Sirloin roast
 - Tenderloin
 - Boneless center loin chops
- Lean veal or lamb
 - Lamb leg or arm
- Other meats
 - Wild rabbit, bison, venison, elk
 - Emu, ostrich, pheasant





Vegetarians and vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 is an essential nutrient that is particularly important for your heart health. It's found in animal products such as fish, poultry, meat, eggs, and dairy products. While B12 isn't naturally found in plant foods, many foods (such as some cereals and soy beverages) are fortified with it. If you eat a strict vegetarian or vegan diet, you need to eat fortified foods daily — or take a supplement.

People over 50 have less ability to absorb vitamin B12 in foods. They can get vitamin B12 in supplements or fortified foods.

Heart-healthy plant proteins

- **Beans and legumes:** Beans are a great source of protein and have the added benefit of being high in soluble fiber and other nutrients. There are many types of beans. And, they can be used in a number of ways. Examples include black beans, pinto beans, navy beans, kidney beans, garbanzo beans, split peas, black-eyed peas, and lentils.
- **Soy and soy products:** Heart-healthy soy protein is found in whole soybeans (edamame), tofu, tempeh, soymilk, soy yogurt, textured soy protein, soy flour, soy nuts, and soy protein powder. Several “meat substitutes” such as meatless burgers and hotdogs also contain soy protein. Many soy products are high in sodium, so check the label for sodium before eating.
- **Nuts and peanuts:** Nuts are a great source of protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, and heart-healthy fats. Some studies say that eating at least 1 ounce of (unsalted) nuts per day reduces total and LDL cholesterol, which helps to lower your risk of heart disease. Some heart-healthy choices include: raw almonds, pistachios, pecans, peanuts, pine nuts, and walnuts.
- **Seeds:** Seeds, like nuts, give you protein as well as many other heart-healthy nutrients. A few good examples include pumpkin, sunflower, chia, ground flax, wheat germ, berry seeds, and sesame seeds. Use seeds on top of salads, hot cereals, or mixed into a healthy trail mix.

Building Block 4: Choose unsaturated fats and oils

TIPS

To meet these targets for fat in your daily diet, try the following:

- Read food labels for saturated fat and trans fat.
- Watch out for hidden fats added during cooking or processing.
- Choose heart-healthy snacks instead of snacks with a lot of saturated fat. Here are some examples:
 - Air-popped (not microwave) popcorn with a light oil or butter spray
 - A handful of raw nuts
 - Celery topped with natural peanut butter
 - Baked corn chips served with avocado dip
 - Whole grain crackers served with an olive- or bean-based spread
- Substitute olive oil for butter or margarine whenever possible. Here are some delicious examples:
 - Combine olive oil with balsamic vinegar to use as a dipping sauce for bread — or better yet, fresh veggies
 - Lightly dress sliced potatoes with olive oil and fresh herbs, then bake to make healthy fries
 - Toss whole wheat pasta with olive oil and herbs along with a small amount of fresh Parmesan cheese (instead of high-fat cream or Alfredo sauce)
- Make your salad or sandwich heart-healthy by doing the following:
 - Experiment with homemade salad dressings by combining olive oil or another heart-healthy oil with different seasoned vinegars
 - Sprinkle your salad with sunflower or sesame seeds instead of bacon bits or croutons
 - Try different kinds of olives to add flavor to a salad
 - Use ¼ of a sliced avocado instead of mayonnaise or salad dressing on any sandwich
 - Substitute hummus for mayonnaise on sandwiches

TARGETS

The American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology (AHA/ACC) recommend avoiding all trans fat and limiting saturated fat to less than 6% of total calories.

Replace saturated and trans fats with polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats.

What do all these numbers mean?

The numbers are important, but all you really need to remember are the 6 heart-healthy building blocks. If you eat according to the building blocks, you will be able to hit these targets without crunching numbers.



Omega-3 fatty acids are especially heart healthy

One type of polyunsaturated fat that's particularly good for your heart is omega-3 fatty acid. This type of fat can help lower triglycerides and help reduce inflammation. It is recommended to eat at least two 4-ounce servings of fatty fish per week. See sources in the table on the right.

What about fish oil supplements?

If you eat enough foods high in omega-3 fatty acids, you may not need to take a fish oil supplement. In some cases, your healthcare provider may recommend that you take supplements to help lower your triglyceride levels. If you do decide to take one, be sure your supplement contains the amounts your healthcare provider recommends.

Choose unsaturated fats and oils

Fats and oils help provide energy and help the body absorb fat-soluble nutrients. Fat also adds flavor and texture to meals and helps you feel satisfied after eating. Some fats are heart-healthy, while others may increase cardiac risk factors. This section shows you how to choose the right types of fats.

Unsaturated fats: The healthiest choice

Unsaturated fat is a type of fat that is liquid at room temperature and comes mostly from plant sources. Eating foods high in unsaturated fat, and eating smaller amounts of foods that contain saturated fats, may help lower LDL cholesterol levels and lower your risk of heart disease. There are 2 main types of unsaturated fat: **monounsaturated** and **polyunsaturated**.

- **Monounsaturated fats** occur mostly in plant oils. Rich sources include:
 - Olive, canola, and peanut oils
 - Olives and avocados
 - Unsalted peanuts, natural peanut butter, almond butter and almonds, hazelnuts, mixed nuts, pistachios, cashews, and pecans
- **Polyunsaturated fats** are found in plant foods and some fish. Good sources include:

OMEGA 3 fatty acids	OMEGA 6 fatty acids
Fatty fish, such as salmon, herring, rainbow trout, halibut, oysters, tuna, sardines	Vegetable oils, such as corn, safflower, sesame, sunflower, cottonseed, flaxseed and soybean
Flaxseed, walnuts, canola oil (rapeseed oil), olive oil	Margarine (liquid or tub), trans-fat free
Fortified foods, such as eggs, margarine, juice, yogurt, milk, and soy milk	Walnuts, brazil nuts, pine nuts

Saturated fat: A less-healthy choice

Saturated fat is a type of fat that is usually solid at room or refrigerator temperature. It's found mainly in foods that come from animals, although some tropical plant oils also contain saturated fat.

Eating foods high in saturated fat and total fat has more influence in raising your blood cholesterol than anything else you eat. Try to minimize your intake of saturated fats.

Examples of foods high in saturated fat are:

- **Animal sources:**

- Fatty meats such as prime grade, rib cuts, T-bone steak, hamburgers, ham, bacon, sausage, pepperoni, hot dogs, salami, bologna, pastrami, liverwurst, poultry with skin, dark meat poultry, and chicken wings
- High-fat dairy products such as whole and 2% milk, butter, cream, half and half, sour cream, regular creamed soups, regular cheese, cream and cheese sauces, whipped cream, and ice cream
- Lard, salt pork, meat gravies from pan drippings, and beef tallow
- Mixed dishes, such as frozen dinners with beef or pork, Italian and Mexican dishes with beef or pork and cheese
- Mixed dishes with eggs, such as restaurant combination plates with pancakes, country-fried steak and eggs, ham and cheese omelet, T-bone steak and eggs, Philly cheesesteak and eggs
- Other sources, such as crispy chicken sandwiches or fried fish sandwiches

- **Plant sources:**

- Cocoa butter, coconut, and coconut milk
- Tropical oils such as coconut, palm, palm kernel oil

What the AHA says about fats

The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends that ALL Americans — not just those with heart conditions — limit their intake of saturated fat and increase their intake of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. Poly- and monounsaturated fats are healthier and associated with a lower risk of disease and death.



Trans fats: unhealthy for your heart

Trans fat is a type of fat that is harmful to your heart health. It can raise your “bad” (LDL) cholesterol and lower your “good” (HDL) cholesterol. For the best heart health, avoid trans fat whenever possible.

Most artificial trans fats have been removed from the U.S. food supply, but small amounts may still be found in some packaged baked goods, fried foods, microwave popcorn, shortening, and stick margarine. Check ingredient lists and avoid products that contain partially hydrogenated oils.

Instead of trans fats, choose healthier fats such as:

- Olive, canola, or avocado oil
- Nuts and seeds
- Nut butters
- Avocados
- Fatty fish such as salmon and trout

Building Block 5: Choose low-fat dairy products or dairy alternatives

TIPS

Tips for meeting this target include the following:

- Use 1% milk or soymilk on whole grain cereals.
- Choose fortified milk substitutes such as soy, rice, or oat milk. For example, many soymilk brands are fortified with calcium, vitamin A, and vitamin D. Drink it plain, or use it on cereal or as a milk substitute in any recipe.
- Give yourself time to adjust to the taste of 1% milk or soymilk. With time, most people come to enjoy these heart-healthy alternatives just as much as the “originals.”
- Watch out for coffee creamers and whipped toppings. These often contain a lot of saturated fat and added sugar. Check the labels, and keep an eye out for low-fat or fat-free creamers and toppings low in sugar.
- Try low-fat powdered milk. It’s easy to prepare and store and adds richness to coffee or tea. Also, adding low-fat powdered milk to a glass of skim milk makes it taste richer.



TARGETS

Stick with products that are 1% fat or skim, and aim for 3 servings (3 cups total) every day.

Sample servings (portions)

- 1 cup 1% or skim milk
- 1 cup fortified, unsweetened soymilk
- 1 cup low-fat yogurt or calcium-fortified soy yogurt
- 1 ounce low-fat cheese
- ¼ cup low-fat cottage cheese

Note: Kids should limit milk intake for kids to 16 to 24 ounces per day to prevent iron deficiency anemia.



Choose low-fat dairy products or dairy alternatives

Dairy products are a good source of calcium, protein, vitamin A, and vitamin D. However, they can be high in saturated fat. Anyone looking to lower their cardiac risk factors should keep this in mind.

But, you don't need to give up dairy products altogether. Sticking to low-fat dairy products or dairy alternatives will give you the same nutritional benefits without the drawbacks.

Lactose intolerant?

The lactose, or milk sugar, in dairy products can be difficult for some people to digest.

If you have trouble with lactose, try the following tips to make sure you get the nutrients you need:

- Look for dairy products that have been pretreated with lactose enzymes (such as Lactaid or generic options.)
- Use a lactase supplement (such as Lactaid or generic options) before drinking milk or eating ice cream.
- Use calcium-enriched soymilk, rice milk, and almond milk. These dairy alternatives are lactose-free.
- Try yogurt, cottage cheese, and cheese as they are lower in lactose than milk.

The calcium connection

Dairy products such as milk, yogurt, and cheese are excellent sources of calcium. However other foods can provide calcium, too.

Try dark green leafy vegetables, tofu, beans, almonds, and calcium-fortified juices and cereals. These foods boost your calcium intake — and provide other helpful nutrients at the same time.



Butter vs. margarine

The best choice is a healthy unsaturated oil, such as olive oil, instead of butter OR margarine. Otherwise, use these tips:

- Choose a soft-tub margarine with liquid vegetable oil as the first ingredient — but use oil in cooking whenever possible.
- Choose a specialty margarine containing substances called plant stanols and/or sterols. Brands such as Benecol and spreads that contain plant stanols will include this information in their label. Studies show that food supplemented with at least 2 to 3 grams of these substances can help reduce LDL (“bad”) cholesterol by 10% in 2 to 3 weeks. Plant stanols and sterols are also available as pills, chews, and powders.
- Look for other products with added stanols or sterols as well. They include some brands of yogurt, orange juice, mayonnaise, fat-free milk, cold cereals, cheese, breads, granola bars — even chocolate and caramel chews.

Building Block 6: Limit sodium (salt), sugar, and alcohol

TIPS

To meet your sodium target, here's what you need to do.

- Follow a diet based on these building blocks. Together, they stack up to a heart-healthy diet with few processed foods.
- Limit adding table salt to your food while cooking or at the table.
- Be aware that nearly all the foods you eat contain a little bit of salt. Check food labels closely, and keep track of your total salt intake each day.
- Limit processed foods, which are typically high in salt. For example, most canned foods, potato chips, pretzels, crackers, lunch meats, salted nuts, and frozen dinners contain a lot of salt.
- If you have a water softener, don't use softened water for drinking or cooking water. Water softeners add quite a bit of salt to the water.
- Check medicine labels. Many over-the-counter medicines such as laxatives, pain relievers, or heartburn medicine contain salt. Ask your healthcare provider before you make any medicine changes.
- Use spices or flavorful foods such as onions and garlic to season meals without adding salt. However, watch out for onion salt and garlic salt.
- All types of salt — including pink, sea, or “Himalayan” salt — have similar impact to your health. One type is not healthier than another.



TARGETS

- **Sodium:** Keep your salt intake to 2,300 mg a day or less.
The 2026 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that most people limit salt to 2,300 mg or less per day. Cutting back to 1,500 mg per day may lower blood pressure even more.
If you have heart failure or high blood pressure, you will need to limit sodium to less than 2000 mg per day. If you have heart failure, you may also need to follow an eating plan that limits fluids and alcohol in your diet.
- **Sugar:** Limit foods and drinks with added sugar, except as an occasional treat.
The American Heart Association recommends no more than 9 teaspoons of sugar for men and 6 teaspoons of added sugar for women and children per day.
- **Alcohol:** If you don't drink, don't start. If you do:
No more than 1 drink per day for non pregnant, adult women and 2 drinks per day for adult men
Only when there is no risk to a health condition.

Limit sodium (salt) sugar, and alcohol

A heart-healthy diet means making good choices — and in some cases, setting a few limits. Here's why you may need to limit salt, sugar, and alcohol.

- **Sodium (salt):** Cutting back on salt is important for everyone, but especially for people with high blood pressure, heart failure, or people who tend to retain fluids. Less sodium means less fluid in your body — and a lighter workload for your heart.
- **Added sugar:** Most sweets have a lot of flavor and a lot of calories, but little nutritional value. That's why they're often called "empty calories." Keep sugar-sweetened beverages, candy, desserts, sports and energy drinks, and fruit drinks to a minimum.
- **Alcohol:** One "drink" means 12 ounces of beer or a wine cooler, 5 ounces of wine, or 1½ ounces hard liquor. Stick with these targets to avoid the extra risk that alcohol use can bring.

The World Health Organization has stated that there is no safe level of alcohol consumption for health. Even light drinking has been connected to at least seven types of cancer.

Sodium, potassium, and high blood pressure

High blood pressure affects 1 in 4 Americans. It makes your heart work harder, damages arteries, and increases your risk for heart disease. Limiting sodium can help reduce this risk. But you may also be able to improve your blood pressure by adding more potassium and calcium to your diet.

Potassium-rich foods include dark green leafy vegetables, fruits from vines, and root vegetables. Here are a few examples

- Potatoes, white or sweet
- Winter squash
- Prunes
- Cantaloupe and honeydew
- Oranges, apricots, bananas
- Soybeans (cooked)
- Spinach
- Tomatoes and tomato products
- Milk (skim or 1%) and plain yogurt (low- or nonfat)
- Legumes

What about salt substitutes? Talk to your healthcare provider before you use salt substitutes. They often contain large amounts of potassium, and they may be useful to some people but harmful to others with certain medical conditions.

What about chocolate, tea, and wine? Indulge (a little)

Chocolate, tea, and wine are great sources of healthy flavonoids. But it's important to indulge in a healthy way:

- Choose dark chocolate more frequently than milk chocolate. Dark chocolate is lower in sugar and fat. A ½-ounce to 1-ounce serving of rich dark chocolate (about half a regular-size chocolate bar) will satisfy a sweet craving while giving you a good dose of flavonoids.
- Two or three cups a day of green, black, or even white tea will nicely boost your flavonoid intake. Skip the cream and sugar, though, and choose decaf if you have trouble sleeping. Be aware that most teas contain vitamin K. Do not change your intake of tea if you are on blood-thinning medicine.
- Enjoy your red wine in moderation. If you don't drink, don't start. If you do, keep it to the limits listed in building block 5. You'll get the most benefit from wine's flavonoids with the least risk.

Shopping, Cooking, and Dining Out

To change what goes on your plate, you'll need to change how you think about your shopping, cooking and dining out. This section will help you make these changes.

Reading food labels

Reading labels can help you make healthy food choices. Look for key words and health claims that fit the requirements of your eating plan. For example, look first for foods labeled “high fiber” or “reduced sodium.”

Even more importantly, pay close attention to the “Nutrition Facts” section of a food label. Look at the “% Daily Value” for each nutrient. A 5% or less means the food is low in that nutrient. A 20% or higher means the food is high in that nutrient.

Compare the numbers below to the food label on the next page.

- 1 What is the serving size?** Adjust the nutrient and calorie you need based on the serving size you need.
- 2 How many calories per serving?** Look here to see how a serving adds to your daily count.
- 3 What is the % Daily Value?** The daily values on food labels are based on 2,000 calories per day. YOUR daily values will be based on your recommended calorie intake.
- 4 What is the total fat?** For heart-healthier eating, choose foods lower in total fat. Consider limiting foods that have more than 10 grams of fat per serving, or that have more than 3 grams of saturated fat. Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats are included under “Total Fat” but are not listed separately.
- 5 How much saturated fat?** Eat as little of this as possible. Saturated fat raises blood cholesterol.
- 6 How much trans fat?** Avoid foods with trans fat. Trans fat raises blood cholesterol and lowers HDL.
- 7 How much cholesterol?** Dietary cholesterol is no longer considered a primary dietary cause of heart disease. Saturated fat intake, overall diet quality, and lifestyle factors have a much greater impact on cardiovascular risk.
- 8 How much sodium (salt)?** Prepared and processed foods usually contain a lot more sodium than you need.
- 9 How much dietary fiber?** Aim for 25 to 30 grams of fiber each day, with most of this coming from whole grains. (See page 9.)
- 10 What is the total sugar?** Compare the total sugar grams with the total carbohydrate grams. If the amount of sugar is the same or higher, the product is high in sugar, and not a good choice.

Nutrition Facts

10 servings per container

1 Serving Size **1 cup (50g)**

2 Amount Per Serving
Calories **250**

3 % Daily Value*

4 Total Fat 8g **10%**

5 Saturated Fat 1g **5%**

6 Trans Fat 0g

7 Cholesterol 0mg **0%**

8 Sodium 150mg **6%**

Total Carbohydrate 40g **14%**

9 Dietary Fiber 5g **17%**

10 Total Sugars 12g

Includes 10g Added Sugars **20%**

Protein 5g

Vitamin D 2mcg **10%**

Calcium 260mg **20%**

Iron 8mg **45%**

Potassium 245mg **7%**

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Even though a food label may list “0 grams” per portion, there still may be some of that nutrient in the food. For example, a label for a nonstick spray may define a portion as 3 sprays and list “0 grams” of total fat in each portion. But if you use more than 3 sprays, you may be getting some fat after all.

Truth in labeling

Federal law governs the key words, health claims, and nutrition facts that appear on a food product label. This makes food labels a trustworthy and valuable resource for heart-healthy eating. Always read food labels and packaging carefully. Use the glossary on page 38 for help.



Another idea...

Instead of changing your current recipes, you might want to check out the heart-healthy cookbooks, websites, and magazines listed on page 36. Many explain how to prepare old favorites and new dishes in a heart-healthy way.

Modifying recipes

With a little creativity and planning, most recipes can be made heart-healthy — often with little or no change in taste or texture. To lower the fat and sodium in your favorite recipes, first check the list of ingredients. Choose the ingredients you need to avoid or reduce, and apply one of these methods:

- **Elimination.** If the ingredient isn't necessary, don't use it! For example, you can leave the salt out of many recipes and still have good results.
- **Reduction.** Can you use less of a particular ingredient? Many recipes will still turn out beautifully if you use less sugar, fat, or oil. Aim to reduce sugar in recipes by one quarter to one half of the called-for amount.
- **Substitution.** Here's your chance to be truly creative: what healthy ingredient can you use instead of an unhealthy one to make a healthier dish? The table below lists a few tried-and-true food substitutions.

Instead of this:	Try this:
1 cup butter	• ½ to 1 cup margarine with a liquid vegetable oil as the first ingredient • Choose spreads such as avocado, hummus, natural peanut butter, or other nut butters
1 cup lard	• ½ to 1 cup vegetable oil (preferably olive, canola, safflower, corn, soybean, or sesame oil)
1 cup shortening	• ¾ cup oil, especially for cookies and breads (food will be crispier) • 1 cup applesauce, pureed pumpkin, banana, or avocado, especially for cakes, muffins, and quick breads (food will be more moist)
1 cup whole milk or evaporated milk	• 1 cup skim or 1% milk, plain low-fat soymilk, or rice milk • Nonfat powdered milk, reconstituted • 1 cup skim evaporated milk
1 cup cream	• 1 cup evaporated skim milk
1 cup shredded cheese or cottage cheese	• ½ to 1 cup lower-fat cheese (Alpine Lace, Free N' Lean, etc.) or lowfat ricotta cheese • ¼ cup very sharp cheese • Mix ½ cup low-fat cottage cheese with ½ cup lower-fat or regular cheese for casseroles
1 tablespoon salad dressing or mayonnaise	• ½ to 1 tablespoon low-calorie salad dressing • 1 tablespoon light or lowfat mayonnaise
1 cup whipped cream	• Homemade substitute (mix ¼ cup ice water with ¼ cup nonfat milk powder — sprinkle powder into water to avoid lumps — beat until thick, then add ¼ teaspoon vanilla, ½ teaspoon lemon juice, and ¼ cup sugar) • Nonfat or low-fat vanilla yogurt • Note: Nondairy whipped toppings are available in high-fat and low-fat versions.
1 whole egg	• 2 egg whites or ¼ cup egg substitute

Instead of this:	Try this:
1 cup mayonnaise	• 1 cup nonfat or low-fat regular or Greek yogurt • $\frac{3}{4}$ cup plain low-fat yogurt mixed with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup or less low-calorie mayonnaise • 1 cup low-calorie imitation, light, or fat-free mayonnaise
1 ounce cream cheese	• 1 ounce Neufchatel cheese • 1 ounce light cream cheese • 1 ounce fat-free ricotta cheese
1 cup sour cream	• 1 cup plain low-fat regular or Greek yogurt • 1 cup lower-fat or nonfat sour cream • 1 cup homemade mock sour cream (blend 1 cup low-fat cottage cheese, 2 tablespoons buttermilk, and $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 teaspoon of fresh lemon juice in a blender until smooth)
1 cup creamed soup	• 1 cup low-fat, healthy creamed soup • For homemade creamed soup base, mix 2 cups nonfat powdered milk, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup flour, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup plus 2 tablespoons cornstarch, $\frac{1}{8}$ cup granulated bouillon, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt. To make soup from this base, add $\frac{1}{8}$ cup dry mix to $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups water. Blend in favorite vegetables.
1 ounce square baking chocolate	• 3 tablespoons cocoa powder plus 1 tablespoon oil
1 pound ground beef or pork sausage	• 1 pound or less extra-lean ground beef (7 % fat or less) • 1 pound vegetables (for lasagna or pasta sauces, try zucchini or mushrooms) • 1 pound tofu • 1 pound lean poultry (turkey or chicken) Note: To reduce fat intake, use $\frac{1}{4}$ pound less per person and drain the fat after cooking. If beef is browned before being added to a sauce or casserole, rinse it in hot water to remove fat.
Salt	To lower your salt intake, experiment with other herbs and spices to add flavor to your meals. Here are just a few examples: • Allspice: stew, tomatoes, peaches, applesauce, gravies • Basil: fish, lamb, salads, Italian sauces • Cinnamon: fruits, pork, bread, sweet potatoes, squash, plain yogurt • Cumin: chili, stews, beans • Curry: lean meats, chicken, fish, tomatoes, sauces, rice • Dill: fish, chicken, vegetables, potatoes, salads, pasta • Garlic: lean meats, fish, poultry, soups, salads, vegetables, pasta dishes • Lemon or lime juice: fish, poultry, salads, vegetables, sauces • Nutmeg: potatoes, chicken, fish, cauliflower, broccoli, and cabbage dishes • Onion: lean meats, stews, vegetables, salads, soups, legumes • Oregano: sauces, Italian dishes, pizza, salads, vegetables • Paprika: fish, poultry, soups, salads, meats, sauces, baked potatoes, beans • Rosemary: chicken, fish, lean pork sauces, stuffing, potatoes, peas, lima beans • Sesame seeds: salads, breads, chicken, vegetables, casseroles • Tarragon: sauces, salad dressings, marinades, vegetables, beets, chicken, fish • Thyme: lean meats, poultry, sauces, soups, peas, salads, tomatoes



Preparing foods

The way you prepare foods can have a big impact on how healthy they are. Here are a few guidelines for heart-healthy cooking:

- Steam, broil, bake, or grill foods whenever possible.
- If you must fry, use a nonstick cooking spray and nonstick cookware instead of oil.
- When cooking stew, soups, or other dishes in which the fat cooks into the liquid, prepare food a day in advance and refrigerate it. Then, you can easily remove the hardened fat from the food before reheating. (This trick also works well for fatty canned foods. Simply chill the can before opening and remove the hardened fat.)
- Sauté or stir-fry vegetables in liquid rather than butter or oil. Good liquids for sautéing include water, bouillon, or de-fatted chicken, vegetable, or beef stock.
- Roast, bake, barbecue, or broil meat on a rack so that fat drips away from the meat.
- To enhance the flavor of low-fat cuts of meat, rub a salt-free seasoning blend on the meat. Spray a pan with oil and sear the meat on medium heat, then add a bit of water or salt-free broth to the pan until it just touches the meat. Cover the pan, turn the temperature down to low, and finish cooking.
- When making gravy, add a few ice cubes to cooled meat drippings. The fat will cling to the ice cubes, which you can then remove. The result is a tasty, low-fat gravy.
- Use vegetable puree to thicken gravies, sauces, soups, and stews. To make vegetable puree, process cooked vegetables in a blender.



Dining out

Heart-healthy eating doesn't mean you have to cook every meal at home. If you enjoy dining out, you can still do so while following a heart-healthy eating plan. It simply takes a little planning and flexibility. The tips in this section can help you make healthier choices when eating at restaurants.

Choosing a restaurant

You can find heart-healthy options at most restaurants. Keep these tips in mind:

Fast-food restaurants

Fast-food meals are often high in calories, saturated fat, sugar, and sodium. However, many restaurants now offer healthier choices. When eating at fast-food restaurants:

- Choose grilled chicken or fish instead of beef, pork, or breaded items.
- Order a regular-sized meal instead of a "super-sized" option. Larger portions often provide more calories and fat than your body needs at one meal.

Restaurants with salad bars

Salad bars can help you add more vegetables and fruit to your meal while filling you up. To build a healthier salad:

- Choose nutrient-rich toppings such as beans, nuts, and seeds.
- Limit high-fat toppings such as bacon, processed meats, and cheese.
- Use a reduced-fat dressing, flavored vinegar, or a small amount of olive oil.
- Be mindful of creamy dressings, which may be high in saturated fat and sodium.

Ethnic restaurants

No type of cuisine is automatically healthy or unhealthy. Healthy and less healthy choices can be found in every style of cooking. The table on the next page offers suggestions for making heart-healthy choices at a variety of restaurants.



Select a sensible salad

Pay attention to salad ingredients and salad dressings. Many contain a lot of salt and fat, and salty, fatty meats and cheeses. Limit these items, or choose healthier alternatives.

Diet soda: Do or don't?

Most people know that sugar-sweetened soda is not a heart-healthy choice. What about diet soda?

Diet soda contains little or no sugar and fewer calories than regular soda, which may make it a better choice than sugary drinks. However, the best choice is water. Unsweetened sparkling water, plain water, and other unsweetened drinks can help you stay hydrated without added sugar or artificial sweeteners.

If you drink soda, try to make it an occasional treat rather than an everyday habit.



Ask your server

Don't hesitate to ask questions about ingredients or preparation methods. Many restaurants can prepare meals with less sodium, steam foods instead of frying them, and serve sauces, gravies, or dressings on the side.

Keep it simple

A good rule of thumb is to choose foods in their simplest form. For example, a skinless chicken breast is usually a better choice than breaded chicken, and a broiled fish fillet is often a better choice than stuffed fish.

Managing portion sizes

Restaurant portions are often larger than needed. To avoid eating too many calories, sodium, and unhealthy fats, try these strategies:

- **Drink water with your meal** (unless you are on a fluid restriction). Staying hydrated may help prevent overeating and can reduce alcohol intake.
- **Be mindful of the breadbasket.** Enjoy one piece if desired, then ask for the basket to be removed or moved out of reach. Choose olive oil instead of butter when available.
- **Request** that your meal be prepared without added salt.
- **Share an entrée** with a friend or family member.
- **Rethink dessert.** Consider sharing a dessert, enjoying a hot beverage, or choosing fresh fruit.
- **Take leftovers home.** Eat until you are comfortably satisfied, then save the rest for another meal.

Choosing healthy foods while dining out

Menu descriptions often provide clues about ingredients and cooking methods. Knowing what these terms mean can help you make healthier choices.

Choose foods that are described as:	Limit foods that are described as:
• Steamed • Broiled • Roasted • Poached • Grilled • Garden fresh • In its own juice • Lean	• Buttery, buttered, or served in butter sauce • Creamed, in cream sauce, in gravy or hollandaise • Au gratin, Parmesan, scalloped, or served with in cheese sauce • Sautéed, fried, pan-fried, crispy, or braised • Breaded or stuffed • Casserole, hash, prime, pot pie • Marinated in oil, basted with butter, or packed in brine

Go and Whoa!

Traffic control for your plate

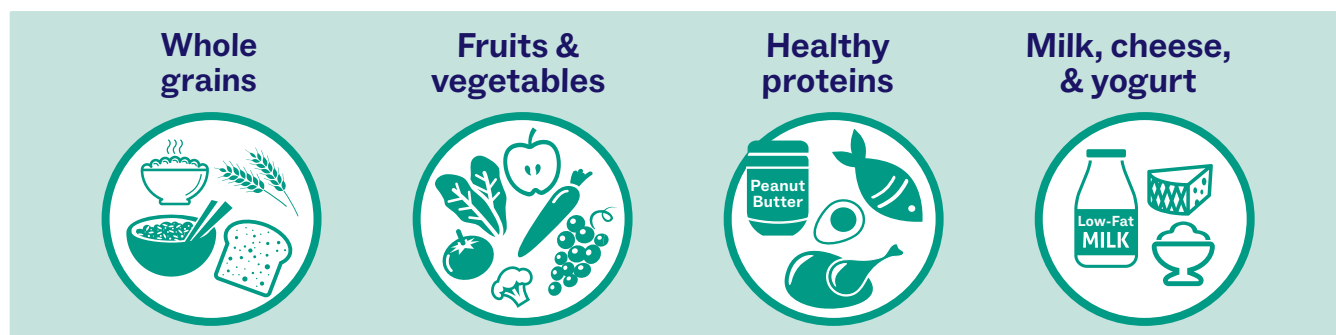
The Traffic Light Eating Plan makes it easier to choose the foods that will keep you as healthy and strong as possible throughout your life.

The traffic light style of eating is:

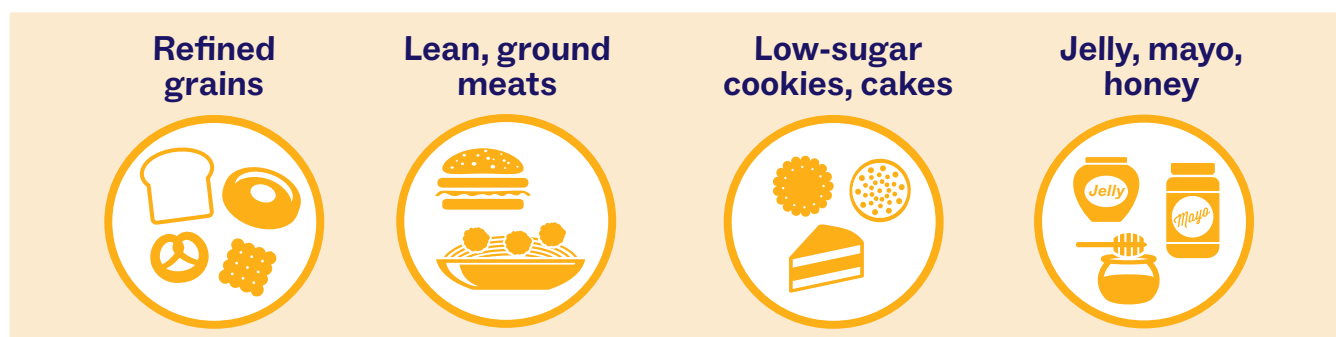
- **Full of nutrients**, like vitamins, fiber, and protein.
- **Low in less healthy foods**, like added sugar and unhealthy fats.
- **All about fresh!** Meals are focused on foods with very little or no processing.
- **Easy and fun!** You get to choose from foods you already like.



Go! Eat daily



Slow! Enjoy in small amounts once or twice a week



Whoa! Eat small amounts less often or rarely



Go! Eat daily

Vegetables (fresh, frozen, canned)	• Asparagus • Baby corn • Bamboo shoots • Beets • Brussels sprouts • Broccoli • Cabbage (red, green, bok choy, Chinese) • Carrots • Cauliflower • Celery sticks • Coleslaw (packaged, no dressing)	• Cooked greens (swiss chard, spinach, collard) • Cucumber • Eggplant • Green beans • Jicama • Kale • Leeks • Mushrooms • Okra • Onions • Peppers	• Radishes • Salad greens (head lettuce, romaine, spinach, arugula, radicchio, watercress) • Spinach • Sprouts • Squash (summer, crookneck, zucchini winter, spaghetti) • Sugar snap peas • Tomatoes • Turnips • Water chestnuts	Meats, Eggs, Milk, Dairy	• Chicken and turkey breast (without skin, extra lean ground) • Eggs and egg substitutes • Fish (baked or grilled, not fried) • Mozzarella or string cheese • Milk (low-fat), cottage cheese, yogurt, sour cream • Pork or beef loin, round, or flank cuts • Tuna (canned in water) • Veggie burgers • Shrimp, crawfish, clams (boiled)
Fruits (fresh, frozen, canned without syrup)	• Apples • Avocados • Bananas • Berries (blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries)	• Cherries • Figs • Grapes • Grapefruit • Kiwis • Melons	• Nectarines • Peaches • Oranges • Plums • Pomegranates	Breads, Grains, & Cereals	• Cold cereals (Cheerios, Wheat Chex, Raisin Bran, Wheaties) • Corn tortillas • Oatmeal (regular or quick) • Pasta (with tomato sauce) • Polenta or quinoa • Whole grain breads, rolls, bagels • Whole wheat couscous, pancakes, tortillas • Rice (brown)
Beans/Legumes, Nuts, & Seeds	• Almonds, cashews, peanuts, pecans, walnuts • Beans (black, kidney, white, chili, lima) • Black-eyed peas • Edamame	• Chickpeas (garbanzos) • Lentils • Natural or low-fat peanut or sunflower seed butter	• Peas • Pine nuts • Pistachios • Pumpkin seeds • Sunflower seeds • Walnuts		
Drinks	• Low-fat milk	• Water or sparkling water		Treats	• Sugar-free gelatin • Sugar-free popsicles

Slow! Enjoy in small amounts once or twice a week

Fruits & Vegetables	• Dried fruit • Fruits canned in syrup • Fruit juice	• Low-fat (baked) hash browns • Potatoes (mashed or baked)	Beverages	• 100% juice (1/2 cup)	
Beans/Legumes, Nuts, & Meats	• Extra-lean or lean beef or bison • Ground chicken or turkey (less than 90% lean) • Chicken or turkey thighs or legs	• Lamb (leg or loin) • Turkey dogs	Bread, Grains, & Cereals	• Bagels • Bread (white) • Cold cereals with added simple sugars • Crackers (saltine, graham, animal)	• Flour tortillas • Muffins • Pancakes / waffles • Rice (white)
Milk & Dairy	• Cheese (American, Cheddar, Colby, Swiss, Monterey Jack, Feta) • Lite cream cheese • Low fat ice cream	• Milk - 2% • Non - or low-fat frozen yogurt • Pudding • Sherbet, sorbet	Treats	• Breakfast & sports bars • Cake / brownies without frosting • Fig newtons, Nilla Wafers	• Granola bars • Jam, jelly, honey • Syrup (chocolate) • Popsicles, creamsicles

Whoa! Eat small amounts less often or rarely

Pair red foods with green foods to balance your plate.

Fruits & Vegetables	• Fruits in heavy syrup • Fried vegetables (french fries, potato chips, tater tots, hash browns)		Beverages	• Chocolate milk (not low-fat) • Drinks made with sugar (soda, lemonade, punch, Kool-Aid)	• Sports / energy drinks (Gatorade, Powerade)
Beans/Legumes, Nuts, & Meats	• Bacon • Beef hot dogs • Beef (ground, 75% lean) • Beans (refried, with lard)	• Chicken nuggets • Fish sticks • Pepperoni • Salami • Sausage • Tuna (in oil)	Bread, Grains, & Cereals	• Cold cereals with sugar (Frosted flakes, Captain Crunch, Fruit Loops) • Chips (potato, corn, tortilla)	• Crackers (cheese, Ritz, Townhouse) • Donuts, croissants, sweet rolls • Macaroni & cheese, Ramen noodles
Milk & Dairy	• Brie • Cream • Cream cheese	• Half & half • Ice cream	Treats, Fats	• Butter • Cake with frosting • Candy, chocolate • Cookies	• Margarine (tub, with hydrogenated oils) • Mayonnaise • Toaster pastries • Pie



A heart-healthy sample menu

Eating according to the six heart-healthy building blocks is one of the best things you can do to lower your cardiac risk factors. As you learn to make healthier choices in your diet, you might be surprised at how many different and delicious options you have for meals and snacks. The sample menu below shows how much variety and flavor you can have in an ordinary day.

Breakfast	• 1 cup oatmeal with cinnamon, almonds, and 1 teaspoon brown sugar • 1 cup skim or soymilk • 1 small banana • Low-fat or nonfat yogurt • ½ ounce raw nuts
Snack	• Fresh fruit • ½ ounce raw nuts
Lunch	• Tuna sandwich on whole grain bread (served with low-fat mayonnaise, lettuce, tomato, and avocado) • 1 cup fresh melon • Celery and carrot sticks
Snack	• 1 cup lowfat yogurt • 1 cup fresh berries
Dinner	• Green salad with vinaigrette or oil and vinegar dressing • 3 ounces tofu, skinless chicken, or fish • 1 cup brown rice pilaf • 1 cup grilled or steamed vegetables • Baked cinnamon apple
Snack	• 3 cups air-popped popcorn with olive oil spray or margarine



Placeholder for kids menu

Eating according to the six heart-healthy building blocks is one of the best things you can do to lower your cardiac risk factors. As you learn to make healthier choices in your diet, you might be surprised at how many different and delicious options you have for meals and snacks. The sample menu below shows how much variety and flavor you can have in an ordinary day.

My Risk Factors



Nutrition Goals to Reduce My Risk

Resources

In this section you'll find resources to help you change your eating patterns for the better, including heart-healthy cookbooks, websites and phone numbers, and a glossary of food packaging terms.

Choosing a cookbook

A good way to review a new cookbook is to check it out from your public library before buying it. This way you can see if the recipes fit your tastes and lifestyle (for example, gourmet or simple, ethnic or mainstream). Here are a few other things to look for:

- Sound nutrition principles. Steer clear of fad diet books that offer “quick-fixes.”
- Recipes that are generally low in saturated fat and sodium.
- Easy-to-find ingredients.
- Easy-to-follow instructions.
- Recipes that provide nutrition information (for example, list calories, fat grams, sodium, and so on).

Websites and phone numbers

The organizations and services below provide information and support for good nutrition and other elements of a healthy lifestyle.

- **American Heart Association**
 - recipes.heart.org
- **Intermountain Health**
 - intermountainhealthcare.org/services/nutrition-services
- **American Diabetes Association**
 - diabetes.org
 - 800-342-2383
- **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics**
 - eatright.org
- **Healthy People 2030**
 - odphp.health.gov/healthypeople



More recipe resources

Look for these magazines at your supermarket or online:

- Eating Well (eatingwell.com)
- Light and Healthy, from America's Test Kitchen (amazon.com)
- Vegetarian Times (vegetariantimes.com)
- Old Ways: Cultural Food Traditions (oldwayspt.org/recipes/)



More from Intermountain Health

Intermountain offers a variety of classes and support programs to help you live a heart-healthy lifestyle. Contact your local facility for more information on the following services:

- Support for quitting tobacco
- Health and physical fitness evaluations
- Diabetes education
- Cardiac rehabilitation

To learn more, check out the links to these education handouts.

Blood pressure basics: What you need to know to manage your blood pressure

Pre-Diabetes: Act Now to Protect Your Health

Living With Diabetes Guide

Quitting Tobacco: Your Journey to Freedom

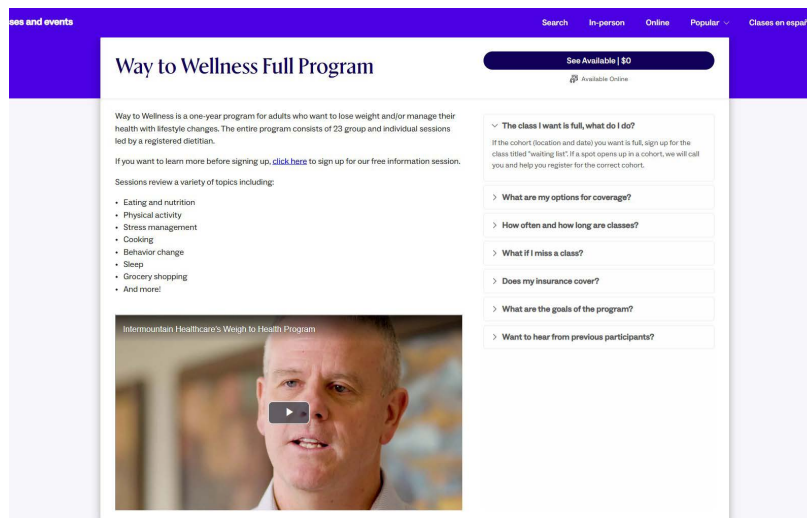
The Way to Wellness: A Weight Management handbook

The Way to Wellness® program

If you'd like help with nutrition counseling and weight loss, check out The Way to Wellness® lifestyle and weight management program. The program is a 12-month course of 22 sessions and is available online.

To get started, scan the code at right or type in this link:

intermountainhealthcare.org/classes-events/detail/way-to-wellness-full-program



Glossary of Nutrition Terms

This glossary spells out what to expect when you see certain terms on a package or label.

Antioxidant [an-tie-OX-eh-dent] Man-made or natural substances that may prevent or delay some types of cell damage. Found in foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables.

Cholesterol free: Less than 2 milligrams of cholesterol and 2 grams (or less) of saturated fat per serving.

Extra lean: Less than 5 grams fat, less than 2 grams saturated fat, and less than 95 milligrams cholesterol per serving.

Fat free: Less than ½ gram of fat per serving.

Low-fat: 3 grams of fat or less per serving.

Lean: Less than 10 grams of fat, 4 grams of saturated fat, and 95 milligrams of cholesterol per serving.

Light (lite): This term can mean several things. Check the Nutrition Facts on the label to find out which of these applies:

- A third less calories, or no more than half the fat of the original version of the product.
- No more than half the sodium compared to the original version of the product.
- A lighter color or texture (this does not affect the nutrition of the product.)

Low cholesterol: Less than 20 milligrams of cholesterol and 2 grams (or less) of saturated fat per serving.

Low sodium: 140 milligrams or less of sodium per serving.

No added salt: No salt is added during processing. This does not guarantee the food product is sodium-free.

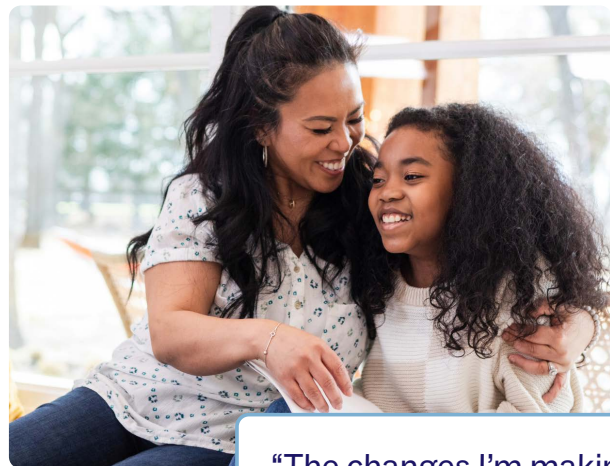
Quercetin: A natural antioxidant flavonoid found in fruits and vegetables (onions, apples, berries). It is used to reduce inflammation, support immune function, and improve cardiovascular health.

Reduced sodium: 25% less sodium than the original version of the product.

Sodium-free: Less than 5 milligrams of sodium per serving.

Very low sodium: 35 milligrams or less of sodium per serving.

Unsalted: No salt is added during processing. This does not guarantee the food product is sodium-free.



“The changes I’m making to help my heart will protect my daughter’s health as well. You’re never too old — or too young — to start a heart-healthy way of life.”

—Marilyn G.

