

Heart Healthy Eating

Your heart's main job is to keep your blood moving throughout your body to supply your tissues and organs with oxygen. Certain things in your diet can affect your heart's ability to do its job.



Things to limit in your diet:

Salt is also called sodium. Eating too much sodium can lead to high blood pressure, which makes your heart work harder. To decrease the amount of sodium in your diet:

- Limit frozen meals, canned foods, processed meats, salty snacks, and fast food.
- Use herbs and salt-free spices instead of salt to season your food.

Saturated fat is solid at room temperature. It is in meats, animal products, and tropical oils. Saturated fats can cause fatty buildup in your arteries. To lower saturated fat in your diet:

- Limit foods that contain solid fats, such as butter and fatty meats like bacon and sausage.
- Check Nutrition Facts labels to find the amount of saturated fat in packaged foods. Choose foods containing one gram of saturated fat or less per serving.

Cholesterol is in meats and animal products and may contribute to fatty buildup in your arteries.

- Eat less meat and whole fat dairy foods like butter, cream, cheese and whole milk.
- If you have high cholesterol, limit very high cholesterol foods including egg yolks, shrimp, squid, and organ meats such as liver and sweetbreads.

Trans fat is in some deep fried foods and processed foods containing partially hydrogenated oils. Trans fat increases your risk for heart disease by raising “bad” LDL cholesterol and lowering “good” HDL cholesterol in the blood.

- Read Nutrition Facts labels on packaged foods and avoid foods that have trans fats or show “partially hydrogenated” in the ingredients list.
- Do not use hard stick margarine. Instead, use soft tub spreads labeled “trans fat free” or, if you must, a small amount of butter.

Sugary foods and drinks can increase blood levels of triglycerides—a type of fat in the blood. Excess intake of sweets can also cause weight gain, which raises your risk for heart disease.

- Eat fewer sweets, like cakes, cookies, candies, and ice cream.
- Choose whole grain foods, like brown rice, whole grain bread and pasta, steel cut oats, barley, and bulgur instead of refined and instant versions.
- Avoid sugary drinks such as regular sodas, sweetened juices, sweet coffees and teas. Drink sports drinks only during and after exercise lasting more than one hour.

Alcohol can raise blood levels of triglycerides—a type of fat in the blood. Alcohol is high in calories and can lead to weight gain.

- Limit alcohol to one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men. One drink is equal to 12 ounces of beer or 5 ounces of wine or 1½ ounces of liquor.

A heart healthy diet includes:

Unsaturated fat is liquid at room temperature. It is healthier than saturated fat or trans fat.

- Use olive oil or canola oil in cooking instead of butter.
- To switch from saturated to unsaturated fat, try peanut butter in place of butter on toast, use avocado instead of cheese on sandwiches, and choose tomato sauce instead of cream sauce on pasta.

Omega-3 fatty acids lower the risk of heart disease and are in foods such as fish, soy oil, canola oil, flaxseeds and walnuts.

- Eat fish like salmon, sardines, and lake trout two or more times a week.
- Omega-3 fats may help lower blood pressure and triglycerides. If your blood pressure or triglycerides are high and you are not a fish eater, talk with your doctor about adding an omega-3 supplement.

Stanols and sterols are plant-based nutrients that can help lower your cholesterol levels. They are found in some buttery spreads or other fortified foods.

- Read ingredient labels and select foods fortified with stanols or sterols.
- Eating two to three grams of stanols or sterols per day (about three tablespoons of fortified buttery spreads) has been shown to lower “bad” LDL cholesterol.
- If you use fortified buttery spreads, use the spread to replace butter or oil. Keep in mind that the spreads have the same amount of calories as other fats, so eating too much can lead to weight gain.

Soluble fiber is in fruits, oats, beans, and lentils, and can help lower cholesterol levels.

- Eat whole fruit instead of drinking juice.
- Replace meat with beans, lentils, or soy protein at least once a week.



In general:

- Limit the total amount of fat in your diet.
- Eat more plant foods and fewer animal foods.
- Aim for at least five servings (approximately 5 cups) of fruits and vegetables a day.
- Limit processed foods such as chips and candy bars, because they are high in fat, sugar, and salt and low in healthful nutrients like fiber, vitamins, and minerals.
- Exercise at least 30 minutes per day.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- If you smoke, quit smoking to lower your risk of heart disease.
- For more information and tips, visit USDA's www.choosemyplate.gov and American Heart Association's patient portal www.hearhub.org