

8 strategies to kick-start your way toward a heart-healthy diet.

1. Limit unhealthy fats and cholesterol.

Limiting how much saturated and trans fats you eat is the most important step you can take to reduce your blood cholesterol and lower your risk of coronary artery disease. A high blood cholesterol level can lead to a buildup of plaque in your arteries, which can increase your risk of heart attack and stroke.

The American Heart Association offers these guidelines for how much fat and cholesterol to include in a heart healthy diet.

Type of Fat	Recommendation
Saturated fat	Less than 7 percent of your total daily calories.
Trans fat	Less than 1 percent of your total daily calories.
Cholesterol	Less than 100 milligrams a day for healthy adults; less than 200 milligrams a day for adults with high levels of low-density lipoprotein (LDL), or “bad,” cholesterol or those who are taking cholesterol-lowering medication.

The best way to reduce saturated and trans fats in your diet is to limit the amount of solid fats – butter, margarine and shortening – you add to food when cooking and serving. You can also reduce the amount of saturated fat in your diet by trimming fat off your meat or choosing lean meats with less than 10% fat.

You can also use low-fat substitutions when possible.

You may also want to check food labels. Many snacks – even those labeled “reduced fat” – may be made with oils containing trans fats. The phrase “partially hydrogenated” in an ingredient is a clue that a food has some trans fat.

Fats to choose	Fats to limit
Olive oil	Butter
Canola oil	Lard
Margarine that’s free of trans fats	Bacon fat

Cholesterol lowering margarine,
(Benecol, Promise active or Smart Balance)

Gravy

Cream sauce

Nondairy creamers

Hydrogenated margarine and
shortening

Cocoa butter, found in chocolate

Coconut, palm, cottonseed and palm-
kernel oils

2. Choose low-fat protein sources.

Lean meat, poultry and fish, low-fat dairy products, and egg whites or egg substitutes are some of your best sources of protein. Choose lower fat options, such as skim milk rather than whole milk and skinless chicken breasts rather than fried chicken patties.

Fish is another good alternative to high-fat meats. And certain types of fish are heart healthy because they are rich in omega 3 fatty acids, which can lower blood fats called triglycerides. The highest amounts of omega 3 fatty acids are found in cold-water fish, such as salmon, mackerel and herring. Other sources are flaxseed, walnuts, soybeans and canola oil.

Legumes – beans, peas and lentils – are good sources of protein and contain less fat and no cholesterol, making them good substitutes for meat.

Proteins to choose

Skim or low-fat (1 % milk)

Fat free or low fat dairy products, such as
Yogurt and cheese

Egg whites or egg substitutes

Fish (salmon)

Skinless poultry

Legumes

Soybeans and soy products

Lean ground meats

Proteins to avoid

Full-fat milk and other dairy
products

Organ meats, such as liver

Egg yolks

Fatty and marbled meats

Spareribs

Cold cuts

Frankfurters, hot dogs and sausages

Bacon

Fried or breaded meats

3. Eat more vegetables and fruits.

Vegetables and fruits are good sources of vitamins and minerals; they are low in calories and rich in dietary fiber. Vegetables and fruits also contain substances found in plants that may help prevent cardiovascular disease. Eating more fruits and vegetables may help you eat less high-fat foods, such as meat, cheese and snack foods.

Fruits and vegetables to choose

Fresh or frozen vegetables and fruits

Low-sodium canned vegetables

Canned fruit packed in juice or water

Fruits and vegetables to avoid

Coconut

Vegetables with creamy sauces

Fried or breaded vegetables

Canned fruit packed in heavy syrup

Frozen fruit with sugar added

4. Select whole grains.

Whole grains are good sources of fiber and other nutrients that play a role in regulating blood pressure and heart health. You can increase the amount of whole grains in a heart-healthy diet by making simple substitutions for refined grain products.

Grain products to choose

Whole-wheat flour

Whole-grain bread, preferably 100% whole wheat or 100% whole-grain

High-fiber cereal with 5 or more grams of fiber a serving

Whole grains such as brown rice, barley and buckwheat (kasha)

Whole-grain pasta

Oatmeal

Ground flaxseed

Grain products to avoid

White, refined flour

White bread

Muffins

Frozen waffles

Corn bread

Doughnuts

Biscuits

Quick breads

Granola bars

Cakes

Pies

Egg noodles

Buttered popcorn

High-fat snack crackers

5. **Reduce Salt.**

Eating a lot of salt can contribute to high blood pressure, a risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Reducing the salt in your food is an important part of a heart-healthy diet. The American Heart Association recommends that healthy adults eat less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium a day (about a teaspoon).

Although reducing the amount of salt you add to food at the table or while cooking is a good first step, much of the salt you eat comes from canned or processed foods, such as soups and frozen dinners. Eating fresh foods and making your own soups and stews can reduce the amount of salt you eat. If you like the convenience of canned soups and prepared meals, look for ones with reduced sodium.

Low-salt items to choose

Herbs and spices

Salt substitutes

Reduced salt canned soups or prepared meals

Reduced salt versions of condiments

High-salt items to avoid

Table salt

Canned soups and prepared foods

Tomato juice

Soy sauce

6. **Control Portion Size.**

In addition to knowing which foods to eat, you'll also need to know how much you should eat. Overloading your plate, taking seconds and eating until you feel stuffed can lead to eating more calories, fat and cholesterol than you should. Portions served in restaurants are often more than anyone needs. Keep track of the number of servings you eat – and use proper service sizes – to keep control your portions.

½ cup pasta – about the size of a hockey puck

2 to 3 ounces of meat, fish or chicken – about the size and thickness of a deck of cards

7. **Plan ahead: Create daily menus.**

Create daily menus using the size strategies listed above. When selecting foods for each meal and snack, emphasize vegetables, fruits and whole grains. Choose lean protein sources and limit high-fat and salty foods. Watch your portion sizes and add variety to your menu choices.

8. **Allow yourself an occasional treat.**

Allow yourself an indulgence every now and then. A candy bar or handful of potato chips won't derail your heart healthy diet. But don't let it turn into an excuse for giving up on your healthy eating plan.

Incorporate these eight tips into your life, and you'll continue to find that heart healthy eating is both doable and enjoyable. With planning and a few simple substitutions, you can eat with your heart in mind.

The American Heart Association
Mayo Clinic