

Heart Disease: Nutrition Guidelines for Prevention

Heart Healthy Dietary Guidelines -- you should eat:

- 8-10% of the day's total calories from [saturated fat](#).
- 30 percent or less of the day's total calories from [fat](#).
- Less than 300 milligrams of dietary [cholesterol](#) a day.
- Limit [sodium](#) intake to 2400 milligrams a day.
- Just enough [calories](#) to achieve or maintain a healthy weight and reduce your blood cholesterol level. (Ask your doctor or registered dietitian what is a reasonable calorie level for you.)

Caloric intake and physical activity: Balance caloric intake and physical activity to achieve or maintain a healthy body weight. These suggestions can help:

- Prepare and eat small portions of food
- Read labels to understand how many calories you eat each day
- Exercise 30-60 minutes/day, if possible
- Build physical activity into your day by taking the stairs instead of the elevator and parking farther away from a building, which forces you to take some extra steps

Benefit: The proper balance of caloric intake and physical activity may help keep you from becoming overweight or help you lose weight; overweight is associated with increased risk of heart disease.

Fruits and vegetables

Consume a diet rich in fruits and vegetables. Follow these tips:

- Select brightly colored fruits and vegetables to get the most nutrients
- Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables each day
- Prepare fruits and vegetables without added fat and sugar, if possible
- Enjoy fresh, frozen, or canned fruits and vegetables to help meet your fruit and vegetable intake

Benefit: Fruits and vegetables are loaded with nutrients, and are low in fat, sodium, sugar, and calories.

Whole-grain, high-fiber foods

Enjoy whole-grain, high-fiber foods, such as:

- Whole-wheat breads
- Bran cereals
- Popcorn
- Oatmeal
- Rye
- Barley
- Corn
- Brown rice
- Wild rice
- Buckwheat
- Bulgur
- Millet
- Quinoa
- Sorghum

Benefit: Whole grains are loaded with nutrients and are associated with a decreased risk of heart disease.

Fish

Consume fish, especially oily fish, at least twice each week. Follow this advice:

- Select oily fish when possible, such as:
 - Salmon
 - Tuna
 - Mackerel
 - Herring
 - Sardines
 - Trout
- Choose other types of fish as part of a healthy diet

Benefit: Fish are high in omega-3 fatty acids, which may decrease your risk of heart disease and sudden death from heart disease.

Saturated fat, *trans* fat, and cholesterol

Limit your intake of saturated fat to <8-10% of calories, *trans* fat to <1% of calories, and cholesterol to <300 milligrams (mg)/day. These suggestions will help:

- Choose lean meats and vegetable alternatives to meat, such as dried beans
- Select fat-free, skim, or 1% milk, and low-fat dairy cheese and yogurt

- Minimize intake of fats such as margarine and other partially hydrogenated fats
- Use liquid oils over solid fats when cooking or baking, whenever possible
- Cut back on pastries and bakery products, such as muffins and doughnuts

Benefit: Diets low in saturated fat, *trans* fat, and cholesterol can reduce the risk of heart disease.

Added sugar

Eat and drink fewer beverages and foods with added sugars. These tips may help:

- Limit beverages high in added sugars, such as soda, fruit punch, and sweetened coffees and teas
- Reduce the number of foods you eat that have added sugar, such as cakes, cookies, pies, and candies

Benefit: By eating fewer foods and beverages with added sugar, you may help prevent unwanted weight gain; weight gain might increase your risk for heart disease.

Salt

Choose and prepare foods with little or no added salt. Follow these suggestions:

- Choose reduced-sodium versions of foods
- Use less salt in cooking and for seasoning foods
- Limit high-sodium condiments (soy sauce, ketchup, etc)

Benefit: Consuming foods with little or no added salt may help prevent high blood pressure.

Alcohol

If you consume alcohol, do so in moderation. Follow this advice:

- Choose one drink/day for women and two drinks/day for men or less
- Do not drink if you:
 - Can not limit your alcohol intake
 - Are to avoid alcohol because of health problems
 - Are to avoid alcohol because of the medications you are taking

Benefit: Alcohol intake is associated with reduced heart risk for those who choose to drink and can drink responsibly.

Other dietary factors

These additional dietary factors might affect your risk of heart disease:

- **Fish oil supplements that contain omega-3 fatty acids:**
 - Use food sources of omega-3 fatty acids, rather than supplements, to prevent heart disease
- **Antioxidant supplements:**
 - Not proven to provide benefits to reduce heart disease risk
 - Eat plenty of fruit, vegetables, and whole grains to obtain antioxidants, instead of taking supplements
- **Folate and other B vitamins:**
 - Folate and other B vitamin supplements are not noted to reduce cardiovascular disease risk
- **Soy protein:**
 - Little evidence exists to prove that soy protein improves heart health
 - Consumption of soy foods may *indirectly reduce heart disease risk* by replacing foods high in fat and cholesterol, such as high-fat meats and dairy foods

[Recipes](#)

If you need further assistance with these recommendations, ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian (R.D.) who can help you with additional nutrition education, cooking suggestions, shopping tips, menu planning, and individualizing a diet to meet your lifestyle needs.

References on file