

Heart Disease: Nutrition Guidelines for Treatment

Improving diet and lifestyle is an important part of treating heart disease. If you have abnormal blood lipids and/or have had a stroke or heart attack, watching your diet can help keep you healthy.

Dietary Guidelines -- you should eat:

- Less than 7% of the day's total calories from [saturated fat](#).
- 25-35 percent of the day's total calories from [fat](#).
- Less than 200 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:

- Enjoy brightly colored fruits and vegetables for 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 <7% of calories, *trans* fat to <1% of calories, and cholesterol to <200 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 sugars, 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 medications you are taking

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

Other dietary factors

- **Fish oil supplements containing omega-3 fatty acids:**
 - You may benefit from omega-3 supplements (fish oil capsules), if your triglyceride level is high
 - Your doctor might recommend 2 to 4 grams (g) of EPA and DHA/day—take this supplement only with the knowledge of your physician
- **Antioxidant supplements:**
 - Antioxidant supplements are not proven to provide benefits to reduce heart disease risk or treatment of heart disease
 - Fruit, vegetables, and whole grains are recommended as sources of antioxidants, instead of supplements
- **Folate and other B vitamins:**
 - Supplements of folate or other B vitamins are not noted for reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease or treating heart disease
- **Plant sterols/stanols:**
 - Plant sterols/stanols may lower LDL cholesterol levels
 - An intake of about 2 g/day is recommended as an enhancement to the diet, not a replacement.
 - Plant sterols are available in fortified food and drinks
 - Your dietitian can help you find the best sources
- **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