

Heart-healthy Eating

Heart-healthy eating is an important way to lower your risk for heart disease and stroke. Heart disease is the number one cause of death for American women. Stroke is the number three cause of death. To get the most benefit for your heart, you should choose more fruits, vegetables and foods with whole grains and healthy proteins. You also should eat less food with added sugar, calories, and unhealthy fats.

Q: What foods should I eat to help lower my risk for heart disease and stroke?

A: You should choose these foods most of the time:

- **Fruits and vegetables.** At least half of your plate should be fruits and vegetables.
- **Grains.** At least half of your grains should be whole grains.
- **Fat-free or low-fat dairy products.** These include milk, calcium-fortified soy drinks (soy milk), cheese, yogurt, and other milk products.
- **Seafood, skinless poultry, lean meats, beans, eggs, and unsalted nuts.**

Q: What foods should I limit to lower my risk of heart disease and stroke?

A: You should limit:

- **Saturated fats.** These fats are found in foods such as pizza, ice cream, fried chicken, many cakes and cookies, bacon, and hamburgers. Check the Nutrition Facts label for saturated fat. Less than 10% of your daily calories should be from saturated fats.
- **Trans fats.** These fats are found mainly in commercially prepared baked goods, snack foods,

fried foods, and margarine. The Food and Drug Administration is taking action to remove artificial trans fats from our food supply because of their risk to heart health. Check the Nutrition Facts label and choose foods with no trans fats as much as possible.

- **Cholesterol.** Cholesterol is found in foods made from animals, such as bacon, whole milk, cheese made from whole milk, ice cream, full-fat frozen yogurt, and eggs. Fruits and vegetables do not contain cholesterol. You should eat less than 300 milligrams of cholesterol per day. Check the Nutrition Facts label for cholesterol. Foods with 20% or more of the “Daily Value” of cholesterol are high in cholesterol.
- **Sodium.** Sodium is found in salt, but most of the sodium we eat is not from salt that we add while cooking or at the table. Most of our sodium comes from breads and rolls, cold cuts, pizza, hot dogs, cheese, pasta dishes, and condiments (like ketchup and mustard). Limit your daily sodium to less than 2,300 milligrams (equal to a teaspoon), unless your doctor says something else. Check the Nutrition Facts label for sodium. Foods with 20% or more of the “Daily Value” of sodium are high in sodium.
- **Added sugars.** Foods like fruit and dairy products naturally contain sugar. But you should limit foods that contain added sugars. These foods include sodas, sports drinks, cakes, candy, and ice cream. Check the Nutrition Facts label for added sugars and limit how much food you eat with added sugars.

Q: How can I tell what is in the foods I eat?

A: The Nutrition Facts label on most packaged foods has information about how many calories and how much saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, sodium, and added sugars are in each serving.

For food that does not have a Nutrition Facts label, such as fresh salmon or a raw apple, you can use the MyPlate SuperTracker “Food-a-pedia” tool at www.supertracker.usda.gov/logout.aspx. By comparing different foods, you can get an idea whether a food is high or low in cholesterol, saturated fat, or sodium.

Q: What tools can help me choose foods that are good for my heart?

A: The following resources can help you choose heart-healthy foods:

- **ChooseMyPlate** (choosemyplate.gov). This resource is based on the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. You can use the SuperTracker tool to create a personal daily food plan based on your goals.
- **Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan** (www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/dash/). The DASH diet is for people with hypertension to help them lower their blood pressure. But it can also be used to help prevent heart disease.
- **Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLC) diet** (www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/cho/cho_tlc.pdf, PDF file, 1.7 MB). The TLC diet helps people with unhealthy cholesterol levels.

For more information...

For more information on heart-healthy eating, call the OWH Helpline at 800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

ChooseMyPlate

www.choosemyplate.gov

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)

Phone: 301-592-8573 • www.nhlbi.nih.gov

Nutrition.gov

www.nutrition.gov

American Heart Association

Phone: 800-242-8721 (English) or 888-474-8183 (Spanish) • www.heart.org

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