

HEART-HEALTHY EATING

Heart-healthy eating, along with regular physical activity, are the main key factors in lowering your risk of heart disease and stroke. Heart-healthy eating means that you eat the right amount of healthy foods from all of the food groups for your age, weight, and height.

To help lower your risk of heart disease and stroke, you should choose these foods most of the time:

Fruits and vegetables: At least half of your plate should be fruits and vegetables.

Whole grains. At least half of your grains should be whole grains, such as whole wheat, oatmeal, and brown rice.

- Fat-free or low-fat dairy products. These include milk, cheese, yogurt, and other milk products. calcium-fortified soy drinks are not dairy.
- Seafood, skinless poultry, lean meats, beans, eggs, and unsalted nuts.
- Oils. Sources of healthier oils and fats include avocados, olives, and canola and olive oils.

To lower your risk of heart disease and stroke, you should limit:

Saturated fats. These fats are found in processed foods such as pizza, ice cream, fried chicken, bacon, hamburgers, many cakes and cookies. 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, and margarine. Check the Nutrition Facts label and choose foods with no trans fats as often as possible.
- 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 processed foods like 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 or nurse 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 with added sugars you eat.

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 check the Food and Drug Administration’s Nutrition Facts posters (www.fda.gov/food/labelingnutrition/ucm063367.htm). The posters show whether a food is high or low in cholesterol, saturated fat, or sodium.

For help with heart-healthy eating, check out that are good for my heart?

- MyPlate Plan (www.choosemyplate.gov/MyPlatePlan). This tool is based on the most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Use it to create a personalized food plan for your age, sex, height, weight, and physical activity level.
- Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan (www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/dash-eating-plan). The DASH diet can help lower your blood pressure and is regularly rated one of the best overall diets by U.S. News & World Report. It can also be used to help prevent heart disease.
- Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLC) diet (www.nhlbi.nih.gov/files/docs/public/heart/chol_tlc.pdf; PDF, 1.7 MB). The TLC diet can help lower your cholesterol and is often in the top 5 diets rated by U.S. News & World Report.
- You can also talk to your doctor or nurse to make a healthy eating plan. Your doctor or nurse might recommend a dietitian (nutrition expert) who can give you advice on what foods to eat and how much of each type.