



Heart Healthy Eating

How can heart healthy eating help prevent heart disease?

What you eat is important to the health of your heart. The foods you choose can help prevent and manage high blood pressure, cholesterol, triglyceride, and blood sugar (glucose) levels. These high levels can increase your risk of heart disease, especially if you have more than one.

Healthy eating, being physically active, reaching and maintaining a healthy body weight, and not smoking are the best lifestyle approaches you can take to prevent heart disease.

Focus on eating foods that protect heart health - fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and healthy fats - and limiting foods that are harmful to heart health. This will have a greater benefit than simply avoiding a few foods.

What foods do I eat?

Eat more plant foods: vegetables and fruit, whole grains, legumes (beans, peas and lentils), nuts, and seeds. These foods have vitamins and minerals, fibre, and phytochemicals that will help keep your heart healthy. The Mediterranean diet is one example of a plant-based heart healthy eating pattern.

Vegetables and fruit

Eat 7 to 10 servings of vegetables and fruit every day. Choose from a wide variety of types and colours, including bananas, berries, broccoli, carrots, kale, oranges, spinach, sweet potatoes, and tomatoes. Whole fruit is healthier than fruit juice. One serving is 120 mL (½ cup) of fresh or frozen vegetables, 250 mL (1 cup) of raw leafy greens, or 1 medium piece of fruit.

To increase your vegetables and fruit:

- include a fruit or vegetable at breakfast;
- plan for at least 2 servings of vegetables or fruit at both lunch and dinner; and
- add extra vegetables to pasta, salads, sandwiches, sauces, soups, stews, and stir-fries.

Whole grains

Eat 3 or more servings of whole grains each day. Whole grains include:

- whole grain wheat, rye, spelt, kamut, barley, oats, and bulgur;

- brown and wild rice;
- buckwheat, triticale, millet, and quinoa; and
- bread products made with whole grain whole wheat flour or other whole grain flours.

A serving of grains is 1 slice of bread, half of a bagel, half of a tortilla, or 120 mL (½ cup) of cooked barley, bulgur, or rice.

For more information about serving sizes visit Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide at www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guides.html

Unsalted nuts or seeds

Eat 4 to 5 servings of unsalted nuts or seeds each week. Nuts and seeds contain heart healthy unsaturated fats, fiber, vitamins, minerals and other nutrients that help to keep your heart healthy. A serving of nuts or seeds is 60 mL (¼ cup).

Plant-based liquid oils

Use plant-based liquid oils instead of animal-based fats and tropical oils. Eating unsaturated fats from liquid vegetable oils is more beneficial to heart health than eating saturated fats from animal-based fats (e.g. butter, ghee, lard) and tropical oils (e.g. coconut and palm oil).

Liquid vegetable oils have different flavours and uses in the kitchen, but all of them can help to improve blood cholesterol levels. Use a variety of healthy plant-based oils to prepare foods, including extra virgin olive, soybean, and canola oils, as well as non-hydrogenated margarines made from these oils.

Foods with omega-3 fats

Eat foods that contain Omega-3 fats. Omega-3 fats are polyunsaturated fats found in fish and some plant foods. The types of omega-3 fats in fish are different from those found in plant foods. All types of omega-3 fats are healthy for your heart, but the fats in fish are the most beneficial.

Aim to eat at least 2 servings of fish a week. Choose fatty fish, such as herring, mackerel, salmon, sardines or trout. These fish contain higher amounts of omega-3 fats. One serving is 75 grams (2 ½ ounces).

Aim to eat more plant sources of omega-3 fats. Plant sources of omega-3 fats include chia and hemp seeds, ground flax seeds, walnuts, soybeans, tofu, and canola oil. Use these foods to add variety to your meals and snacks by sprinkling them on salad, cereal, and yogurt, and by using tofu instead of meat in meat-based soups, stir-fries, and sauces.

What foods do I limit or avoid?

Foods high in trans and saturated fats

Eating foods high in trans and saturated fats can increase your risk of heart disease. Foods typically high in trans fat include shortening, hard margarine, deep fried foods, and store-bought frozen pizzas, pie crusts, cookies, cakes, and crackers. Foods high in saturated fat are largely animal based and include foods such as red meat, processed meat, cheese, ice cream, cream, and whole milk products.

To reduce foods high in trans and saturated fats:

- Look at the total number of grams of trans fat on the Nutrition Facts table on prepackaged foods. Choose foods that list “0” (zero) grams of trans fat.
- Replace meat with fish or legumes such as beans, peas and lentils.
- Take the skin off chicken, turkey, and other poultry before cooking.
- Choose lean cuts of meat, such as round, rump, and tenderloin. Trim any visible fat.
- Use lower fat milk, yogurt, and cheese.
- Choose grilled, steamed, or baked foods instead of deep fried foods when eating out.

For more information on dietary fats see [HealthLinkBC File #68f Dietary Fats and Your Health](#).

Refined grains and grain products

Limit low-fibre breakfast cereals, white rice, and breads, snack foods, and baked goods made with white all-purpose flour, enriched flour, or wheat flour. These foods contain less of the healthful components found in whole grains, including fibre, vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals.

Sugary drinks

Sugary drinks contain added sugars that provide calories but little or no nutrition and often take the place of healthier choices like water or milk. Sugary drinks include pop, energy drinks, fruit drinks, sport drinks, slushes, vitamin-enhanced waters, and specialty coffee and tea drinks.

Excess calories from all sources, including sugary drinks can lead to weight gain. Excess body weight can

increase the risk of diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.

Foods high in sodium

Everyone needs some sodium, but too much can raise blood pressure and increase the risk of heart disease. Most adults need only 1500 mg of sodium each day. To lower sodium in your diet:

- Eat fewer packaged, ready-to-eat and take out foods.
- Limit processed meats, including deli meats, bacon, sausages, hot dogs, and pepperoni.
- Prepare your own meals using low or no sodium-added ingredients such as herbs and spices.
- Use the % Daily Value (%DV) on the Nutrition Facts Table to compare products. Choose foods with 15% DV or less for sodium.

For more ideas about ways to lower your sodium, see [HealthLinkBC File #68b Lifestyle Steps to Lower Your High Blood Pressure](#).

What can I do to maintain a healthy weight?

Maintaining a healthy weight can lower your risk of heart disease and improve heart health.

To help you reach and maintain a healthy body weight:

- Follow the recommendations in Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide around the number and size of servings you need from each food group.
- Use smaller plates (9 to 10 inches in diameter), bowls, and glasses to help control portion sizes.
- Fill half your plate with vegetables and fruit at lunch and dinner. See the Eat Well Plate at www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/eating-nutrition/healthy-eating-saine-alimentation/tips-conseils/interactive-tools-outils-interactifs/eat-well-bien-manger-eng.php
- Be physically active every day.

For More Information

- Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada www.heartandstroke.ca.
- HealthLink BC - Mediterranean Diet www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/aa98646

For more nutrition information, call **8-1-1** to speak to a registered dietitian, or visit www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating.

For physical activity information or advice, call **8-1-1** to speak with a qualified exercise professional, or visit www.healthlinkbc.ca/physical-activity.

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C. visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** (toll-free). For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.