

Healthy Diet, Healthy Heart



H E A R T C A R I N G

A healthy diet is important to managing your blood pressure and reducing your risk of heart attack, heart disease, stroke and other diseases. How much of what you're eating is just as important as what it is you're eating. Being able to recognize portion sizes and monitor intake is essential to a

heart-healthy diet. Eating out of the bag, overloading your plate and taking second helpings until you're full and eating all of what's on your plate at a restaurant can lead to eating more calories, fat and cholesterol than needed.

Control your portions by measurement cups or scales, or if you don't have any of those tools on hand, compare what you're eating to common objects:

- One serving, or a half cup, of pasta is the size of a hockey puck
- One serving, or 2-3 ounces, of meat, fish or poultry is about the size of a deck of cards

Tips for healthy eating

More fruits and vegetables. It's no secret that fruits and veggies are a great source of essential vitamins and minerals. They are also low in calories and rich in dietary fiber. Choose meals where fruits or vegetables are the main ingredient, such as a stir-fry or salads. With any diet, variety is the key to the best nutritional choices. Leaving the skin on fruits and vegetables will increase your fiber intake, and eating lots of different types of fruits and vegetables will keep your diet interesting and will provide you with different sources of nutrients to maximize your healthy diet.

Pick this: Any colorful fresh or frozen fruits or vegetables.

Not that: Vegetables with cream sauces, fried or breaded vegetables, fruit packed in syrup, frozen or canned fruit with sugar added, frozen or canned vegetables with salt added.

Whole grains. Whole grains are a good source of fiber. They also have other nutrients that play a role when it comes to monitoring blood pressure and heart health. Make simple substitutions in your diet for refined grain products, or opt for couscous, quinoa, barley or flaxseed. Flaxseeds are high in omega-3 fatty acids and can lower your cholesterol. In addition, clinical studies suggest that diets rich in omega-3 fatty acids can lower blood pressure. Plus, they're great for stirring into yogurt, applesauce or cereal.

Pick this: Products made with whole-wheat flour, whole-grain or whole-wheat bread, high-fiber cereal (5 grams or more of fiber per serving), brown rice, barley, buckwheat, oatmeal (steel cut or regular), couscous, quinoa, flaxseed.

Not that: White flour, white bread, muffins, frozen waffles, corn bread, doughnuts, biscuits, cakes, pies, egg noodles, buttered popcorn, high-fat snack crackers.

The "good" kind of fats. Limiting how much saturated and trans fats you eat is necessary to reduce your blood cholesterol and lower your risk of coronary artery disease. The best way to limit these is to decrease the amount of solid fats you take in, including butter or shortening. Be sure to check the labels of most snack foods, like cookies, crackers or chips, to ensure you're taking in the least amount of these

fats as possible. When you do use fats, opt for monounsaturated fats found in canola or olive oil. Polyunsaturated fats, often found in nuts and seeds, are also good for a heart-healthy diet.

Pick this: Olive oil, canola oil, trans fat-free margarine or cholesterol-lowering margarine.

Not that: Butter, lard, bacon fat, gravy, cream sauce, nondairy creamers, hydrogenated margarine and shortening.

Low-fat protein sources.

Lean meats and low-fat dairy products are always the way to go. Fish is also a good option for heart health because it's often rich in omega-3 fatty acids (just like flaxseed). The best types of fish for omega-3 fatty acids are cold-water fish, including salmon, mackerel and herring. Legumes or beans, peas and lentils — are also a great healthy source of protein.

Pick this: Low-fat dairy products (like skim milk), egg whites, fish, skinless poultry, legumes, beans, soybeans and soy products, lean ground meats.

Not that: Full-fat or whole milk and other dairy products, organ meats (like liver), egg yolks, fatty and marbled meats, spareribs, cold cuts, hot dogs, sausages, bacon, fried or breaded meats.

Pick this: Herbs and spices, salt substitutes, reduced-salt canned soups or vegetables, reduced-salt versions of condiments, such as reduced-salt soy sauce and reduced-salt ketchup.

Not that: Table salt, canned soups or prepared foods, frozen dinners, tomato juice, soy sauce.

If you need help designing a healthy eating program, contact your healthcare provider, who can direct you to a nutritionist who can design a plan customized to your particular healthcare needs.

Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) is a flexible and balanced eating plan that is based on research studies sponsored by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI). These studies showed that DASH lowers high blood pressure and improves levels of blood lipids (fats in the bloodstream), which reduces the risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

