



How Do I Follow a Healthy Diet?

The American Heart Association recommends an eating plan that emphasizes intake of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains and includes low-fat dairy products, poultry, fish, legumes (dried beans and peas), nontropical vegetable oils, nuts and seeds. It should limit intake of sodium, sweets, sugar-sweetened beverages and red meats.



Vegetables

- One serving equals: 1 cup raw leafy vegetables (about the size of a small fist); ½ cup cut-up raw or cooked vegetables; ½ cup vegetable juice.
- Eat a variety of colors and types, especially deeply colored vegetables, such as spinach, carrots, and broccoli.
- Look for vegetables that are fresh, frozen, or canned in water without added sugar, saturated and *trans* fats, or salt.

Fruits

- One serving equals: 1 medium fruit (about the size of a baseball); ¼ cup dried fruit; ½ cup fresh, frozen, or canned fruit; ½ cup 100% fruit juice.
- Eat a variety of colors and types, especially deeply colored fruits such as peaches and berries.
- Eat whole fruits to get all of the nutrients (such as fiber) that can be missing in some juices.

Whole grains

- One serving equals: 1 slice bread; ½ cup hot cereal, 1 cup flaked cereal; or ½ cup cooked rice or pasta (about the size of a baseball).
- At least half of your servings should be high-fiber whole grains. Select items like whole-wheat bread, whole-grain crackers and brown rice.
- Aim for about 25-30 grams of fiber from foods each day.

Poultry, fish and lean meats (less than 6 cooked ounces per day)

- A 3 oz. portion is about the size of a deck of playing cards, ½ of a chicken breast or ¾ cup of flaked fish.
- Enjoy at least 2 servings of baked or grilled fish each week; especially fish high in omega-3 fatty acids, like salmon, trout, and herring. (3 oz. of grilled or baked fish is about the size of a checkbook).
- Trim all visible fat from meats before cooking.
- Remove skin from poultry before eating.

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Nuts, seeds, and legumes

- One serving equals: $\frac{1}{3}$ cup or $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz nuts; 2 Tbsp. peanut butter (no salt added); 2 Tbsp. or $\frac{1}{2}$ oz seeds; $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked legumes (dried beans or peas).
- Add beans to your soups, salads, and pasta dishes.
- Try unsalted nuts in your salads, stir-fries, or stirred into yogurt.

Low-fat dairy products

- One serving equals: 1 cup milk or yogurt or $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz. low sodium, fat-free or low-fat cheese (about the size of 6 stacked dice).
- Use only milk products with 0% to 1% fat. 2% milk is not low-fat.
- Have only fat-free or low-fat yogurt with no added sugars.
- Use dry-curd, fat-free or low-fat cottage cheese.
- Cheeses (low-sodium, fat-free or low-fat) should have no more than 3 grams of fat per oz. and no more than 2 grams of saturated fat per oz.



HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at **heartinsight.org**.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at **heart.org/supportnetwork**.

Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

How many calories should I eat each day?

What's a good, healthy cookbook?

My Questions:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.



How Can I Improve My Cholesterol?

There are several lifestyle changes that you can make to improve your cholesterol. You can eat healthy foods, reach and maintain a healthy weight and be physically active. Some people also need to take medicine to lower their cholesterol because changing their lifestyle and diet isn't enough. Your healthcare providers will help you set up a plan for improving your cholesterol — and keeping yourself healthy!

Most heart and blood vessel disease is caused by a buildup of cholesterol, plaque and other fatty deposits in artery walls. The arteries that feed the heart can become so clogged that the blood flow is reduced, causing chest pain. If a blood clot forms and blocks the artery, a heart attack can occur. Similarly, if a blood clot blocks an artery leading to or in the brain, a stroke results.



Cholesterol can join with fats and other substances in your blood to build up in the inner walls of your arteries. The arteries can become clogged and narrow, and blood flow is reduced.

What should I eat?

Focus on eating foods low in saturated and *trans* fats such as:

- A variety of fruits and vegetables.
- A variety of whole grain foods like whole grain bread, cereal, pasta and brown rice. (At least half of the servings should be whole grains.)
- Fat-free, 1 percent and low-fat milk products.
- Poultry without skin and lean meats. When you choose to eat red meat and pork, select options labeled “loin” and “round.” These cuts usually have the least amount of fat.
- Fatty fish such as salmon, trout, albacore tuna and sardines. (Enjoy at least two servings baked or grilled each week.)
- Unsalted nuts, seeds, and legumes (dried beans or peas).
- Nontropical vegetable oils like canola, corn, olive, or safflower oils.

What should I limit?

- Foods with a lot of sodium (salt)
- Sweets and sugar-sweetened beverages
- Red meats and fatty meats that aren't trimmed
- Meats that have been processed with a lot of sodium
- Full-fat dairy products such as whole milk, cream, ice cream, butter, and cheese
- Baked goods made with saturated and *trans* fats like donuts, cakes cookies
- Foods that list the words “hydrogenated oils” in the ingredients panel
- Saturated oils like coconut oil, palm oil and palm kernel oil
- Solid fats like shortening, stick margarine and lard
- Fried foods

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What are some cooking tips for me?

- Add a variety of fruits and vegetables to your meals.
- Use a rack to drain off fat when you broil, roast or bake poultry and meats.
- Look for leaner cuts if you choose to eat meat.
- Don't baste with drippings; use wine, fruit juice or marinade.
- Broil or grill instead of pan-frying.
- Cut off all visible fat from meat before cooking, and take all the skin off poultry pieces.
- Use a vegetable oil spray to brown or sauté foods.
- Serve smaller portions of higher-calorie dishes.
- Use low-fat, low-sodium options instead of regular cheese.



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Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

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For example:

What about eating out?

Why are weight control and physical activity important?

My Questions:

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