

Protect Your Heart: Make Smart Food Choices

How can smart food choices help keep my heart and blood vessels healthy?

Diabetes raises your chances of having a heart attack or a stroke. But you can protect your heart and blood vessels by taking these steps:

Eat more

- whole grains
- vegetables and fruit
- healthy fats (but not too much)
- fish
- foods with omega-3 fats
- cholesterol-lowering margarine

Cut back on

- saturated fat
- trans fat
- cholesterol
- fat for cooking
- calories
- salt (sodium)
- alcoholic beverages

Making smart food choices can also help you lose weight and keep your blood glucose (sugar) levels on target. For recipes and information about foods, visit www.diabetes.org/MyFoodAdvisor.

How can I make smart food choices?

Here are some ways to make smart food choices. Put a check mark next to 2 things you'd like to try. Talk with your health care provider for more ideas.

Foods to choose more often

- **Eat more whole grains.** Try to eat whole-grain versions of breads, cereals, crackers, pasta, and other grains at least half of the time.
 - Check the list of ingredients on foods made from grains. Choose foods that show “whole” or “whole grain” as the first ingredient. Examples include whole-wheat flour, whole oats, oatmeal, whole-grain cornmeal, popcorn, whole-rye flour, barley, and bulgur.
 - Try whole-wheat pasta instead of regular pasta.
 - Have brown rice, whole-wheat couscous (a quick-cooking grain), or a boxed whole grain mix instead of white rice.



Making smart food choices can protect your heart and blood vessels.

• Eat more vegetables and fruit.

- Eat at least one vegetable or a salad at lunch and dinner. Snack on raw vegetables.
- Try new ways of cooking vegetables, such as steaming, stir-frying, or roasting.
- Eat dark green and dark yellow vegetables every day, such as broccoli, spinach, collards, kale, carrots, squash, chilies, and peppers.
- Choose fruit for dessert or when you crave something sweet.

• Choose heart-healthy fats.

Choose the kinds of fat that can help lower your cholesterol. But keep in mind that all fats are high in calories. If you're trying to lose weight, you'll want to keep servings small.

- Cook with healthy fats. Choose from olive oil, canola oil, corn oil, soybean oil, sunflower oil, and safflower oil.
- Have a handful of low-salt nuts for a snack several times a week.

• **Eat more fish.**

- Have fish 2 to 3 times a week. Choose from albacore tuna, herring, mackerel, rainbow trout, sardines, and salmon. They all are high in omega-3 fats, a type of fat that may help lower blood fat levels and prevent build-up of unhealthy plaque in the arteries.

• **Eat foods with omega-3 fats.**

- Add flaxseeds and walnuts to your morning cereal.
- Use canola oil, soybean oil, flaxseed oil, or walnut oil.

• **Use cholesterol-lowering margarine.**

- Switch to a cholesterol-lowering margarine. These margarines contain an ingredient (called plant stanol esters) that keeps cholesterol from being absorbed.

Foods to cut back on

• **Cut back on foods with saturated fat.**

- Eat less butter, whole milk, high-fat ice cream, high-fat cheese, and lard.
- Choose meats that have less fat, such as ground beef with 7% fat instead of 15%.
- Eat lean meats or meat substitutes such as beef round, chuck roast, rib roast, fish, pork tenderloin, or poultry without the skin.
- Choose lower-fat versions of cheese and milk. For example, try reduced-fat cheddar cheese. If you buy 2% milk now, try 1% milk. If you already use 1% milk, try fat-free milk.

• **Cut back on foods with trans fat.**

- Check food labels and avoid trans fat whenever you can.
- Watch out for foods that list trans fat, hydrogenated oil, or partially hydrogenated oil on the labels.
- Buy soft margarines that are trans fat-free or low in trans fat. If you buy stick margarine, choose margarine with liquid vegetable oil listed as the first ingredient.

• **Cut back on high-cholesterol foods.**

- Cut back on egg yolks, organ meats such as liver, high-fat dairy products, and high-fat meat and poultry.
- Choose packaged foods with little or no cholesterol. Check the Nutrition Facts and the list of ingredients on food labels.

• **Cook using low-fat methods. Use heart-healthy fats.**

- Broil, microwave, bake, roast, steam, or grill foods.
- Use nonstick pans and use heart-healthy oils like canola, olive, sunflower, or corn oil cooking sprays.

• **Cut back on calories if you need to lose weight.**

- Compare your usual daily calories to the total you should have to lose weight. Keep track of what you eat for a day or two. Then go to www.diabetes.org/MyFoodAdvisor and click on “Explore Foods.” Add up your total calories for a day.

• **Cut back on salt (sodium).**

- Limit sodium to no more than 1,500 milligrams each day.
- Check on sodium content online at www.diabetes.org/MyFoodAdvisor. Click on “Explore Foods.” Or check food labels for sodium content.
- Add less salt to your food. Try to get used to the taste of food without salt.
- Use herbs, spices, or lemon juice instead of salt.

For more help, ask your health care team for copies of these brochures: Toolkit No. 9: *Protect Your Heart: Choose Fats Wisely*, Toolkit No. 10: *Protect Your Heart: Plan and Cook Heart-Healthy Meals*, and Toolkit No. 11: *Protect Your Heart: Check Food Labels to Make Heart-Healthy Choices*.

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