

Hearts n♥ Parks

A Joint Program of the
National Recreation and
Park Association and
the National Heart, Lung,
and Blood Institute

Eat Right for a Healthy Heart

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S. Fortunately, though, there are things you can do to protect yourself and your family against heart disease.

For example, following an eating plan that balances calorie intake with your level of physical activity and is low in saturated and total fat, and cholesterol, and rich in fruits and vegetables, lowfat dairy foods, and whole grains can help protect you against high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, and overweight—factors that, along with physical inactivity and smoking, increase the risk of heart disease. This eating plan may also help prevent cancer and other health problems.

The earlier you take action, the better. Research shows that heart disease begins early in life and that, once learned, bad habits are hard to break. So you and your family should adopt a heart healthy eating plan now.

Here's some advice about heart-healthy eating from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA):

- Balancing the calories in the foods you eat with the calories your body uses in physical activity is key to maintaining a healthy body weight, or even to losing weight if you are overweight. Being overweight increases your risk of developing high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, and other serious diseases or conditions.
- The kinds and amounts of foods you eat can affect your ability to maintain weight. High fat foods contain more calories per serving than other foods and increase the likelihood of weight gain. However, even when people eat less high fat food, they still can gain weight from eating too much of foods high in starch, sugars, or proteins.
- Healthy people over age 2 should consume less than 10 percent of the day's total calories from saturated fat; less than 30 percent from fat; and less than 300 milligrams of dietary cholesterol per day.



Be Good To Your Heart

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- Saturated fat raises cholesterol in the blood more than anything else eaten. Saturated fat is found mainly in animal foods. One way to cut down is to switch to lower fat foods, including lowfat or fat free dairy products and to remove skin from poultry.
- Cholesterol in the diet also can raise blood cholesterol. It is found only in foods from animals. Meat and poultry have similar amounts. Since eggs are especially high in cholesterol, limit intake to 4 eggs per week.
- Unsaturated fat does not raise blood cholesterol but can add calories. Be careful of extra calories when trying to lose weight.
- Another key to healthy eating is choosing foods lower in salt and sodium, which can affect blood pressure. Have no more than 2,400 mg of sodium a day—equal to about one teaspoon of table salt. This includes salt used in cooking. Instead, season food with herbs and spices. Also, snack on unsalted pretzels, popcorn without salt or butter, and crackers or fruits.
- Having adequate intakes of vitamins and minerals, especially potassium, calcium, and magnesium, also are important for lowering blood pressure.
- Limit alcohol since it supplies calories but few or no nutrients—for example, no more than two 12-ounce beers in a day for men and one for women.
- To help you follow a heart healthy eating plan, read food labels to choose foods that are lower in calories, total fat, saturated fat, and sodium.

Special Tips for Kids and Seniors:

American children are gaining weight. They are eating too much saturated fat from high-calorie fast- and snack foods and not getting enough physical activity. Try cutting back on high-fat foods for your children by offering more fruits as snacks. Vegetables can be chopped into small pieces and added to favorite recipes without kids noticing. Combine rice with vegetables. Whole wheat or bran breads add fiber to sandwiches. For desserts, offer fig bars, ginger snaps, graham crackers, or frozen fatfree dairy desserts.

Children often eat many meals away from home, making it harder to maintain good eating habits. To improve fast food meals, order a small plain hamburger—it has less fat than fried or battered items—and hold the cheese or special sauce. Or, try lean roast beef and grilled or broiled chicken sandwiches or pita pockets with small pieces of meat and vegetables.

Seniors need to be diet smart too. Maintaining a healthy body weight is important for older people, since we begin to lose weight as we age. Some weight may be lost from muscle, so be sure that your diet is rich in protein and carbohydrates while watching out for too many saturated fats.

Some medications, such as diuretics, may flush nutrients from the body, so be careful to get enough potassium, calcium, and magnesium. Potassium is especially important for blood pressure and is abundant in bananas. Calcium requirements increase with age. Try to get 1,000-1,500 mg/day. Good sources are leafy green vegetables and dairy foods, such as milk, yogurt, and cheese--but choose low or nonfat types. If milk causes digestive discomfort, try yogurt or a lactose-free dairy product.

Adults Can Reduce the Risk:

- Keep total cholesterol levels low—less than 200mg/dL is best
- Keep blood pressure at a healthy level—less than 130/85 mm Hg is normal
- Maintain a healthy weight—to lose weight, do so slowly; 1 pound lost/week means 500 less calories/day or 500 more calories used/day
- Be physically active—all it takes is 30 minutes of moderate level activity on most, and preferably all days.

**Learn more by visiting NHLBI online at
www.nhlbi.nih.gov**