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## Eating Heart-Healthy Foods

Eating has a big impact on your heart health. In fact, eating healthier can improve several of your heart risks at once. For instance, it helps you manage weight, cholesterol, and blood pressure. Here are ideas to help you make heart-healthy changes without giving up all the foods and flavors you love.

### Getting started

- Talk with your healthcare provider about eating plans, such as the DASH or Mediterranean diet. You may also be referred to a dietitian.
- Change a few things at a time. Give yourself time to get used to a few eating changes before adding more.
- Work to create a tasty, healthy eating plan that you can stick to for the rest of your life.

### Goals for healthy eating

Below are some tips to improve your eating habits:

- **Limit saturated fats and trans fats.** Saturated fats raise your levels of cholesterol, so keep these fats to a minimum. They are found in foods such as fatty meats, whole milk, cheese, and palm and coconut oils. Avoid trans fats because they lower good cholesterol as well as raise bad cholesterol. Trans fats are most often found in processed foods.
- **Reduce sodium (salt) intake.** Eating too much salt may increase your blood pressure. Limit your sodium intake to 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day (the amount in 1 teaspoon of salt), or less if your healthcare provider recommends it. Dining out less often and eating fewer processed foods are two great ways to decrease the amount of salt you consume.
- **Managing calories.** A calorie is a unit of energy. Your body burns calories for fuel, but if you eat more calories than your body burns, the extras are stored as fat. Your healthcare provider can help you create a diet plan to manage your calories. This will likely include eating healthier foods as well as exercising regularly. To help you track your progress, keep a diary to record what you eat and how often you exercise.



### Choose the right foods

Aim to make these foods staples of your diet. If you have diabetes, you may have different recommendations than what is listed here:

- **Fruits and vegetables** provide plenty of nutrients without a lot of calories. At meals, fill half your plate with these foods. Split the other half of your plate between whole grains and lean protein.
- **Whole grains** are high in fiber and rich in vitamins and nutrients. Good choices include whole-wheat bread, pasta, and brown rice.

- **Lean proteins** give you nutrition with less fat. Good choices include fish, skinless chicken, and beans.
- **Low-fat or nonfat dairy** provides nutrients without a lot of fat. Try low-fat or nonfat milk, cheese, or yogurt.
- **Healthy fats** can be good for you in small amounts. These are unsaturated fats, such as olive oil, nuts, and fish. Try to have at least 2 servings per week of fatty fish, such as salmon, sardines, mackerel, rainbow trout, and albacore tuna. These contain omega-3 fatty acids, which are good for your heart. Flaxseed is another source of a heart-healthy fat.

## More on heart-healthy eating

### Read food labels

Healthy eating starts at the grocery store. Be sure to pay attention to food labels on packaged foods. Look for products that are high in fiber and protein, and low in saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium. Avoid products that contain trans fat. And pay close attention to serving size. For instance, if you plan to eat two servings, double all the numbers on the label.

### Prepare food right

A key part of healthy cooking is cutting down on added fat and salt. Look on the internet for lower-fat, lower-sodium recipes. Also, try these tips:

- Remove fat from meat and skin from poultry before cooking.
- Skim fat from the surface of soups and sauces.
- Broil, boil, bake, steam, grill, and microwave food without added fats.
- Choose ingredients that spice up your food without adding calories, fat, or sodium. Try these items: horseradish, hot sauce, lemon, mustard, nonfat salad dressings, and vinegar. For salt-free herbs and spices, try basil, cilantro, cinnamon, pepper, and rosemary.

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