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Nutrition & Exercise For Strong Hearts

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HEART HEALTHY LIVING

Many people are unaware that heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States. Implementing a heart healthy lifestyle is a necessary component to proactively lower your risk of heart disease. Several major risk factors of heart disease include high blood pressure, high LDL cholesterol, smoking, being overweight, poor diet, diabetes, physical inactivity, and excessive alcohol intake. Your diet can be modified to help lower cholesterol, lower blood pressure, keep triglycerides down, and help keep off the extra pounds. The heart healthy nutrition and life-

style tips below can contribute towards a positive heart health. The tips will help you better identify the types of foods to eat more of and the ones to limit, as well as the content to look for on food labels.

Diet & Lifestyle Tips For Heart Health:

• Increase fruits and vegetables

Eat a variety of colorful heart healthy fruits and vegetables each day. Being rich in fiber, vitamins, and antioxidants, fruits and vegetables help lower cholesterol and blood pressure. Aim for 5-6 servings a day for overall preventative heart health and 8-10 servings a day to help lower blood pressure.

• Replace high saturated fat foods with monounsaturated fat foods

Limiting saturated fat found in red meat/beef, processed meats, butter, fried food, and full fat dairy to less than 7% is recommended to improve heart health. Choosing leaner protein sources such as chicken without skin, turkey, fish, egg whites, and fat free dairy instead of eating the fattier cuts of meat and cheese will help lower



your saturated fat intake. By limiting egg yolks to 3 or less a week will also reduce the saturated fat in your diet and help keep your total dietary cholesterol intake under the recommended 300mg per day. To replace saturated fat with monounsaturated fat, I suggest cooking and preparing food with olive oil, canola oil, avocado, and natural nut butters in place of butter, sour cream, cream cheese, creamy dressing, and deep fried food. I also recommend snacking on heart healthy fruits, vegetables, raw nuts, and seeds instead of saturated fat rich pastries, cakes, chips, and ice cream.

• **Increase omega-3 fatty acid rich foods**

Omega-3 rich foods have anti-inflammatory benefits that help to lower blood pressure, triglycer-



ides, and LDL cholesterol, and increase protective HDL cholesterol. While cutting down on the higher saturated fat beef and processed meats, increase your intake of



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heart healthier omega-3 rich fish. Salmon, tuna, sardines, halibut, and cod are all abundant sources of omega-3 fatty acids. You can also increase your intake of omega 3's by having 1-2 tablespoons of chia seeds or flax seeds each day in addition to consuming walnuts, canola oil, soybeans, and pumpkin seeds. Adding those items to oatmeal, oat bran cereal, smoothies, yogurt, and salad can give your food a heart healthy boost.

• **Reduce your sodium intake**

9 out of 10 people consume more than the recommend amount of sodium. A high sodium intake may put a person at risk of high blood pressure which can lead to heart disease and stroke. Aim to consume less than 2400mg a day, with a goal of 1500mg a day. Since 1 teaspoon of table salt has approximately 2300mg of sodium alone, you can significantly reduce your total sodium intake by not adding extra salt to the food you are eating. Instead of cooking and preparing

food with table salt, try using salt-free alternatives such as salt-free seasoning, garlic, lemon juice, ginger, and vinegar. Also eat less canned, packaged, smoked, cured, and processed foods such as canned soups, deli meats, and chips to lower your dietary sodium intake.

- **Increase fiber intake**

Aim for 25 g of fiber a day. On food labels look at the fiber content, especially the amount of soluble fiber, which has a major impact on lowering cholesterol. To improve your fiber intake, eat beans, lentils, fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds, oats and other whole grains and limit white processed

flour. Eating a soluble fiber rich breakfast such as oatmeal with strawberries, blueberries, and walnuts and snacking on soluble fiber rich seeds, apples, pears, peas, and mixed raw nuts can help lower cholesterol and prevent heart disease.

- **Exercise, Exercise, Exercise**

Having a consistent exercise regimen helps lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol, and obtain a healthy weight. Exercise also increases the healthy HDL cholesterol, which can be protective in preventing heart disease when levels are above 60mg/dl. Aim to exercise at least 30 minutes a day and increase daily physical activity. For example, consider briskly walking to work and school and taking the stairs more often. Even three 10 minute walks a day can help lower risk of heart disease.

- **Reducing weight if overweight**

If overweight, losing weight can lower cholesterol, lower blood pressure, and reduce your risk of diabetes, all of which reduces the risk of heart disease. All of these healthy eating tips along with exercise will help you lose weight. Be mindful of serving sizes and reduce your portions of food at meals and snacks. Dine out less often and eat more home cooked meals to not only cut down on hidden calories, but to also reduce your consumption of sodium and



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saturated fat.

• **Last but definitely not least, stop smoking**

Smoking is a major risk factor of heart disease. Therefore, avoid directly smoking tobacco and secondhand smoke to reduce the risk of heart disease. If you smoke, quitting will benefit your health right away, no matter the length of time and amount you

It's never too early to follow a heart healthy lifestyle for preventative health. I encourage a family approach to heart healthy living and recommend healthy dietary habits from the start.

TOP 10 HEART HEALTHY FOODS:

1. Oats and fiber rich whole grains
2. Fish
3. Fruit
4. Vegetables
5. Mixed raw nuts
6. Beans and lentils
7. Olives and olive oil
8. Avocado
9. Seeds (especially flax, chia, hemp, and pumpkin seeds)
10. Organic soybeans