



NUTRITION & HEART HEALTH

You don't have to do a dramatic overhaul to your diet to see improvements in your weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol. Making small changes can be just as effective in lowering your risk of heart disease and may be easier to stick with for the long term.

You may want to follow a formal diet so you know exactly what to eat, or you might prefer to have some general guidelines to keep in mind. Either way, a heart-healthy diet should include these principles:

- Stay within a reasonable daily calorie limit. Your diet shouldn't cut out entire groups of foods or leave you hungry all the time. Prepackaged meals (single portions of balanced, calorie-controlled meals) may be an option for you.
- Use proper serving sizes. Consider getting a food scale so you can measure or weigh your food until you can learn to judge portions on your own. If you don't want to use a scale, you can find portion size guides online.
- Cut back on:
 - o Red meat.
 - o Sugary foods and drinks. Try foods made with low- or no-calorie sweeteners, like sucralose, stevia, and aspartame instead of sugar.
 - o Saturated and trans fats. Use healthier oils and sprays like olive or canola.

- o Sodium. Limit yourself to 2,300 milligrams (Approximately one teaspoon a day) or less daily; 1,500 milligrams a day should be the max if you want to lower blood pressure. Talk to your doctor about whether you should use a salt substitute.
- o Processed foods or canned foods.
- Eat a variety of food that includes:
 - o Fruits and vegetables, especially those that are high in potassium, like bananas, raisins, and oranges (7-9 servings every day).
 - o Whole grains (6-8 servings a day).
 - o Low-fat dairy (2-3 servings a day).
 - o Fish and lean meats prepared without skin or added fats (up to 6 ounces a day).
- Get plenty of fibre. A fibre-rich diet has been linked to a lower risk of heart disease and diabetes as well as lower blood pressure, lower bad cholesterol, lower blood sugar, and a healthy weight. Most adults need 20-30 grams a day. Great sources are whole fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and beans. If you can't get enough from food, a fibre supplement might help. Check with your doctor about the type you should try.

Are there supplements that I can take to improve my heart health?

Omega-3 fatty acid, which is found mainly in fish, may help lower blood pressure and triglycerides, lowering your risk of heart disease. It's best to get omega-3s from food, so you should aim to eat fatty fish, like salmon, mackerel, and trout, at least twice a week.

When you aren't getting enough omega-3s from food, a supplement may help. If you have heart disease or high triglycerides, talk to your doctor first. You may need larger doses or prescription-strength omega-3s.



HERE ARE 15 HEART-HEALTHY FOODS

1. Leafy green vegetables

Leafy green vegetables like spinach, kale, and collard greens are well known for their wealth of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants.

They're a great source of vitamin K, which helps protect your arteries and promote proper blood clotting.

They're also high in dietary nitrates, which have been shown to reduce blood pressure, decrease arterial stiffness, and improve the function of cells lining the blood vessels.

One analysis of eight studies found that increasing leafy green vegetable intake was associated with up to a 16% lower incidence of heart disease.

Another study in 29,689 women showed that a high intake of leafy green vegetables was linked to a significantly lower risk of coronary heart disease.

2. Whole grains

Whole grains include all three nutrient-rich parts of the grain:

- Germ
- Endosperm
- Bran
- Common types of whole grains include:
- Whole wheat

- Brown rice
- Oats
- Rye
- Barley
- Buckwheat
- Quinoa

Refined carbohydrates increase the risk of coronary heart disease. Conversely, whole grains are protective. An extra 1 or 2 servings per day of these foods increases or decreases risk by approximately 10% to 20%.

Multiple studies have found that including more whole grains in your diet can benefit your heart health.

Conclusions include that eating three or more servings of whole grains daily was associated with a 22% lower risk of heart disease.

Adopting a diet rich in plant-based foods, whole grains, low fat dairy products, and sodium intake within normal limits can be effective in the prevention and management of hypertension.

When purchasing whole grains, make sure to read the ingredients label carefully. Phrases like "whole grain" or "whole wheat" indicate a whole grain product, while words like "wheat flour" or "multigrain" may not.

3. Berries

Strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, and raspberries are jam-packed with important nutrients that play a central role in heart health.

Berries are also rich in antioxidants like anthocyanins, which protect against the oxidative stress and inflammation that contribute to the development of heart disease. Studies show that eating lots of berries can reduce several risk factors for heart disease.

For example, one study in 33 adults with obesity showed that consuming strawberries at two and a half servings for 4 weeks significantly improved insulin resistance and LDL (bad) cholesterol.

Another study found that eating blueberries daily improved the function of cells that line the blood vessels, which help control blood pressure and blood clotting.

Additionally, an analysis of 22 studies showed that eating berries was associated with reductions in LDL (bad) cholesterol, systolic blood pressure, body mass index, and certain markers of inflammation.

Berries can be a satisfying snack or delicious low-calorie dessert. Try adding a few different types to your diet to take advantage of their unique health benefits.



4. Avocados

Avocados are an excellent source of heart-healthy monounsaturated fats, which have been linked to reduced levels of cholesterol and a lower risk of heart disease.

One study looked at the effects of three cholesterol-lowering diets in 45 people with overweight and obesity, with one of the test groups consuming one avocado per day.

The avocado group experienced reductions in LDL (bad) cholesterol, including lower levels of small, dense LDL (bad) cholesterol, which is believed to significantly raise the risk of heart disease.

The lipid-lowering and cardioprotective effects of avocado have been demonstrated in several studies.

Avocados are also rich in potassium, a nutrient that's essential to heart health. In fact, just one avocado will supply 975 milligrams of potassium, or about 28% of the amount that you need in a day.

Getting at least 4.7 grams of potassium per day can decrease blood pressure by an average of 8.0/4.1 mmHg, which is associated with a 15% lower risk of stroke.

5. Fatty fish and fish oil

Fatty fish like salmon, mackerel, sardines, and tuna are loaded with omega-3 fatty acids, which

have been studied extensively for their heart-health benefits. Omega-3 fatty acids from fish may have a protective role in the risk of developing heart disease and slightly reduce the risk of CVD events and arrhythmias.

Another study showed that eating fish over the long term was linked to lower levels of total cholesterol, blood triglycerides, fasting blood sugar, and systolic blood pressure.

Fish consumption is associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease, depression, and mortality.

If you don't eat much seafood, fish oil is another option for getting your daily dose of omega-3 fatty acids.

Fish oil supplements have been shown to reduce blood triglycerides, improve arterial function, and decrease blood pressure. Other omega-3 supplements like krill oil or algal oil are popular alternatives.

6. Walnuts

Walnuts are a great source of fiber and micronutrients like magnesium, copper, and manganese.

Research shows that incorporating a few servings of walnuts in your diet can help protect against heart disease.

Evidence for cardiovascular disease prevention is strong for some varieties of tree nuts, particularly walnuts.

A 2019 study in 365 participants showed that diets supplemented with walnuts led to greater decreases in LDL (bad) and total cholesterol. Interestingly, some studies have also found that regularly eating nuts such as walnuts is associated with a lower risk of heart disease.

7. Beans

Beans contain resistant starch, which resists digestion and is fermented by the beneficial bacteria in your gut. Resistant starch has the potential to exert a healthy impact on the gut and certain members of its resident microbiota.

One review of 26 studies also found that a diet high in beans and legumes significantly decreased levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol. What's more, eating beans has been linked to reduced blood pressure and inflammation, both of which are risk factors for heart disease.

8. Dark chocolate

Dark chocolate is rich in antioxidants like flavonoids, which can help boost heart health. Interestingly, several studies have associated eating chocolate with a lower risk of heart disease.

Consuming chocolate in moderation (less than 6 servings a week) may decrease your risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Additionally, chocolate can be



high in sugar and calories, which can negate many of its health-promoting properties.

Be sure to pick a high-quality dark chocolate with a cocoa content of at least 70% and moderate your intake to make the most of its heart-healthy benefits.

9. Tomatoes

Tomatoes are loaded with lycopene, a natural plant pigment with powerful antioxidant properties.

Antioxidants help neutralize harmful free radicals, preventing oxidative damage and inflammation, both of which can contribute to heart disease. Low blood levels of lycopene are linked to an increased risk of heart attack and stroke.

Increasing the intake of tomato products and lycopene supplementation have positive effects on blood lipids, blood pressure, and endothelial function.

A study of 50 overweight women found that eating two raw tomatoes four times per week increased levels of HDL (good) cholesterol. Higher levels of HDL (good) cholesterol can help remove excess cholesterol and plaque from the arteries to keep your heart healthy and protect against heart disease and stroke.

10. Almonds

Almonds are incredibly nutrient-dense, boasting a long list of

vitamins and minerals that are crucial to heart health. They're also a good source of heart-healthy monounsaturated fats and fiber, two important nutrients that can help protect against heart disease.

Research suggests that eating almonds can have a powerful effect on your cholesterol levels, too.

One study involving 48 people with high cholesterol showed that eating 1.5 ounces (43 grams) of almonds daily for 6 weeks reduced belly fat and levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol, two risk factors for heart disease.

Research also shows that eating almonds is associated with higher levels of HDL (good) cholesterol, which help reduce plaque buildup and keep your arteries clear.

Remember that while almonds are very high in nutrients, they're also high in calories. Measure your portions and moderate your intake.

11. Seeds

Chia seeds, flaxseeds, and hemp seeds are all great sources of heart-healthy nutrients, including fibre and omega-3 fatty acids. Numerous studies have found that adding these types of seeds to your diet can improve many heart disease risk factors, including inflammation, blood pressure, cholesterol, and triglycerides.

For example, hemp seeds are high in arginine, an amino acid that has been associated with reduced blood levels of certain inflammatory markers. Furthermore, flaxseed may help keep blood pressure and cholesterol levels well managed.

Supplementing your diet with milled flaxseed has many health-promoting benefits for the body. There is evidence that dietary flaxseed lowers your risk of cardiovascular disease and cancer and may help other conditions like gastrointestinal health and diabetes.

12. Garlic

For centuries, garlic has been used as a natural remedy to treat a variety of ailments. In recent years, research has confirmed its potent medicinal properties and found that garlic can even help improve heart health.

This is thanks to the presence of a compound called allicin, which is believed to have a multitude of therapeutic effects.

In one study, taking garlic extract in doses of 600-1,500 mg daily for 24 weeks was as effective as a common prescription drug at reducing blood pressure.

One review compiled the results of 39 studies and found that garlic can reduce total cholesterol by an average of 17 mg/dL and LDL (bad) cholesterol by 9 mg/dL in those with high cholesterol.



Other studies have found that garlic extract can inhibit platelet buildup, which may reduce the risk of blood clots and stroke.

Be sure to consume garlic raw or crush it and let it sit for a few minutes before cooking. This allows for the formation of allicin, maximizing its potential health benefits.

13. Olive oil

A staple in the Mediterranean diet, the heart-healthy benefits of olive oil are well documented. Olive oil is packed with antioxidants, which can relieve inflammation and decrease the risk of chronic disease. It's also rich in monounsaturated fatty acids, which many studies have associated with improvements in heart health.

A study involving 7,216 adults at high risk for heart disease showed that those who consumed the most olive oil had a 35% lower risk of developing heart disease. Furthermore, a higher intake of olive oil was associated with a 48% lower risk of dying from heart disease.

Olive oil is high in oleic acid and antioxidants and has been found to be helpful at preventing and treating hypertension.

Take advantage of the many benefits of olive oil by drizzling it over cooked dishes or adding it to vinaigrettes and sauces.

14. Edamame

Edamame is an immature soybean frequently found in Asian cuisine. Like other soy products, edamame is rich in soy isoflavones, a type of flavonoid that may help lower cholesterol levels and improve heart health.

Including soy protein in your diet may lead to a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease.

If combined with other changes to diet and lifestyle, even slightly reducing your cholesterol levels can have a big impact on your risk of heart disease.

One study showed that including 30 grams of soy protein per day in a lipid-lowering diet improved participants' blood lipids, reducing the risk for cardiovascular disease.

In addition to its isoflavone content, edamame is a good source of other heart-healthy nutrients, including dietary fibre and antioxidants.

15. Green tea

Green tea has been associated with several health benefits, from increased fat burning to improved insulin sensitivity. It's also brimming with polyphenols and catechins, which can act as antioxidants to prevent cell damage, reduce inflammation, and protect the health of your heart.

One study showed that green tea extract effectively increased leptin and reduced LDL (bad) cholesterol in obese women after 6 weeks of treatment even though there were no significant changes in other biochemical markers related to weight.

A review of studies found that taking green tea extract for 3 months reduced blood pressure, triglycerides, LDL (bad) and total cholesterol, compared to a placebo.

Taking a green tea supplement or drinking matcha, a beverage that is like green tea but made with the whole tea leaf, may also benefit heart health.

THE BOTTOM LINE

As new evidence emerges, the link between diet and heart disease grows stronger.

What you eat can influence almost every aspect of heart health, from blood pressure and inflammation to cholesterol levels and triglycerides.

Including these heart-healthy foods as part of a nutritious, well-balanced diet can help keep your heart in good shape and minimize your risk of heart disease.

