

## Q. What should I eat to keep my heart healthy?

**A.** Making an effort to eat healthy foods is one of the best things you can do to keep your heart healthy and prevent heart disease.

But a lot of people don't eat healthy. If you're thinking about improving your diet to keep your heart healthy, start by answering these two questions:

1. How often do you eat French fries, red meats, pizza, pastries, and processed foods?
2. How often do you have sugary drinks?

If you eat a lot of these foods, you're at risk for high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and other health problems. These conditions can damage your arteries, which can lead to heart attack, stroke, and death. Consider this:

- Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. It claims the lives of about 648,000 people a year.<sup>1</sup>
- Every 40 seconds, someone in the United States has a heart attack.<sup>2</sup> Some recover. Some require surgery and long-term therapy. And many don't survive.

### Eat heart-healthy foods

Choosing the right foods can help prevent heart disease. If you already have heart disease, or you're at risk, improving your diet can help, too. And it's easy. Research shows eating more plant-based foods and less junk food can improve heart health.<sup>3</sup> Eat more of these heart-healthy foods:



**Eat Heart-Healthy Foods**

### Fruits and vegetables

At meal time, fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables. Brightly-colored fruits, berries, and leafy-green vegetables are best. They have high levels of antioxidants that can help prevent plaque build-up in your arteries. Ultimately, this protects your heart. Aim for 8-10 daily servings of fruits and vegetables.

### Nuts & seeds

Nuts and seeds contain healthy, unsaturated fat. This kind of fat helps lower LDL (bad) cholesterol levels, which can protect your heart from disease.

Nuts also contain omega-3 fatty acids and other nutrients that can improve the health of your arteries and reduce the risk for blood clots. Try to eat a handful of nuts (about 1½ ounces) each day.

### Legumes

Legumes, such as black beans, kidney beans, and peas, contain the highest amount of fiber of any food group. High-fiber foods can lower cholesterol levels, reduce the risk for diabetes, and curb hunger to avoid weight gain. All of this

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can lead to a healthier heart. Adult women need at least 25 grams of dietary fiber per day for best health. Men need at least 38 grams per day.

### Whole Grains

Whole grains contain bran, fiber, and other nutrients that help lower blood sugar, cholesterol, and triglycerides (or fat) in the blood. This is good for heart health. Eat at least three servings of whole grains per day. A variety of grains is best, especially ones high in water-soluble fiber. Try oatmeal, whole-grain cereals, breads and pasta, brown rice, and quinoa.

Eating a plant-based diet is the best way to reduce your risk for heart disease. If you're not used to eating this way, start small with a healthy snack. Gradually add more fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, and whole grains to your eating plan. Then top off your new eating habits with 30 to 60 minutes of exercise on most days for a healthier heart.

### References

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3. Kovell, L., et al. (2019). Healthy diet reduces markers of cardiac injury and inflammation regardless of macronutrients. International Journal of Cardiology, 299: 282-288. From: <https://tinyurl.com/qwqmk97>

