

High Cholesterol

Diet and Lifestyle Recommendations

Heart-Healthy Diet

Learn how to eat a heart-healthy diet and reduce your risk of heart disease.

By paying close attention to what you eat, you can reduce your chance of developing atherosclerosis, the blocked arteries that cause heart disease. If the artery-clogging process has already begun, you can slow the rate at which it progresses. With very careful lifestyle modifications, you can even stop or reverse the narrowing of arteries.

While this is very important for everyone at risk for heart disease, it is even more important if you have had a heart attack and/or procedure to restore blood flow to your heart or other areas of your body, such as angioplasty, bypass surgery or carotid surgery. Following prevention advice can protect against restenosis, or the re-narrowing of your arteries.

Feed Your Heart Well

Feeding your heart well is a powerful way to reduce or even eliminate some risk factors.

Adopting a heart-healthy diet can help reduce total and LDL cholesterol (the "bad" cholesterol), lower blood pressure, lower blood sugars, and reduce body weight. While most dietary plans just tell you what you CAN'T eat (usually your favorite foods!), the most powerful nutrition strategy helps you focus on what you CAN eat. In fact, heart disease research has shown that adding heart-saving foods is just as important as cutting back on others.

Here are 5 nutrition strategies to lower your cholesterol and reduce your risk of heart disease:

1. **Eat more vegetables, fruits, whole grains and legumes.** These wonders of nature may be one of the most powerful strategies in fighting heart disease.
2. **Choose fat calories wisely.** Keep these goals in mind: Limit total fat grams; Eat a bare minimum of saturated fats and trans-fatty acids (for example, fats found in butter, salad

dressing, sweets and desserts); When you use added fat, use fats high in monounsaturated fats (for example, fats found in olive and peanut oil).

3. **Eat a variety -- and just the right amount -- of protein foods.** Commonly eaten protein foods (meat, dairy products) are among the main culprits in increasing heart disease risk. Reduce this nutritional risk factor by balancing animal, fish and vegetable sources of protein.
4. **Limit cholesterol consumption.** Dietary cholesterol can raise blood cholesterol levels, especially in high-risk people. Limiting dietary cholesterol has an added bonus: You'll also cut out saturated fat, as cholesterol and saturated fat are usually found in the same foods. Get energy by eating complex carbohydrates (whole wheat pasta, brown or wild rice, whole-grain breads) and limit simple carbohydrates (regular soft drinks, sugar, sweets). If you have high cholesterol, these simple carbohydrates exacerbate the condition and may increase your risk for heart disease.
5. **Feed your body regularly.** Skipping meals often leads to overeating. For some, eating five to six mini-meals may help keep cravings in check, help control blood sugars and regulate metabolism. This approach may not be as effective for those who are tempted to overeat every time they are exposed to food. For these individuals, three balanced meals a day may be a better approach.

Other Heart-Healthy Strategies

1. **Reduce salt intake.** This will help control your blood pressure.
2. **Exercise.** The human body was meant to be active. Exercise strengthens the heart muscle, improves blood flow, reduces high blood pressure, raises HDL cholesterol ("good" cholesterol), and helps control blood sugars and body weight.
3. **Hydrate.** Water is vital to life. Staying hydrated makes you feel energetic and eat less. Drink 32 to 64 ounces (one to two liters) of water daily (unless you are fluid restricted).
4. **Enjoy every bite.** Your motto should be dietary enhancement, not deprivation. When you enjoy what you eat, you feel more positive about life, which helps you feel better and less likely to overindulge.

How Much Is a Serving?

When you're trying to follow an eating plan that's good for your heart, it may help to know how much of a certain kind of food is considered a "serving." The following table offers some examples:

SERVING SIZES		
Food/amount	Serving/exchange	The size of
1 cup cooked rice or pasta	2 starch	tennis ball
1 slice bread	1 starch	compact disc case
1 cup raw vegetables or fruit	1 fruit or vegetable	baseball
1/2 cup cooked vegetables or fruit	1 fruit or vegetable	fist
1 ounce cheese	1 high-fat protein	pair of dice
1 teaspoon olive oil	1 fat**	half dollar
3 ounces cooked meat	1 protein	deck of cards or cassette tape
1/2 cup tofu	1 protein	deck of cards or cassette tape
** Remember to count fat servings that may be added to food while cooking, such as oil, butter or shortening.		

Eat a Wide Variety of Foods

This chart shows the suggested number of servings from each food group based on a daily intake of 1,600 or 2,000 calories. There is a right number of calories for you, depending on your age, physical activity level and whether you are trying to lose, gain or maintain your weight. If you need fewer calories than shown below, decrease the number of servings and increase the servings if you need more calories.

Food Type	1,600 calories	2,000 calories	Sample Serving Sizes
Grains At least half of your servings should be whole-grain	6 servings per day	6–8 servings per day	- 1 slice bread - 1 oz dry cereal (check nutrition label for cup measurements of different products) - ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, or cereal (about the size of a baseball)
Vegetables Eat a variety of colors and types	3–4 servings per day	4–5 servings per day	- 1 cup raw leafy vegetables (about the size of a small fist) - ½ cup cut-up raw or cooked vegetables - ½ cup vegetable juice
Fruits Eat a variety of colors and types	4 servings per day	4–5 servings per day	- 1 medium fruit (about the size of a baseball) - ¼ cup dried fruit

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ½ cup fresh, frozen, or canned fruit - ½ cup fruit juice
Fat-free or low-fat dairy products	2–3 servings per day	2–3 servings per day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 cup fat-free or low-fat milk - 1 cup fat-free or low-fat yogurt - 1½ oz fat-free or low-fat cheese (about the size of 6 stacked dice)
Lean meats, poultry, and seafood	3–6 oz (cooked) per day	Less than 6 oz per day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 oz cooked meat is about the size of a computer mouse - 3 oz grilled fish is about the size of a checkbook
Fats and oils Use liquid vegetable oil and soft margarines most often	2 servings per day	2–3 servings per day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 tsp soft margarine - 1 Tbsp mayonnaise - 1 tsp vegetable oil - 1 Tbsp regular or 2 Tbsp low-fat salad dressing (fat-free dressing does not count as a serving)
Nuts, seeds,	3–4 servings per	4–5 servings per	- 1/3 cup or 1½ oz nuts

and legumes	week	week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 Tbsp peanut butter - 2 Tbsp or ½ oz seeds - ½ cup dry beans or peas
Sweets and added sugars	0 servings per week	5 or fewer servings per week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 Tbsp sugar - 1 Tbsp jelly or jam - ½ cup sorbet and ices - 1 cup lemonade

Physical Activity and Cholesterol

Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for heart disease. The American Heart Association recommends getting at least 30 minutes of physical activity, preferably every day but at least more days than not. You don't need to get your minutes all at once — it's fine to break up your activity into 10-minute sessions or 15-minute sessions.

For some people, regular physical activity affects blood cholesterol level by increasing the level of HDL (good) cholesterol. A higher HDL level is linked with a lower risk of heart disease. Physical activity can also help control other risk factors for heart disease: weight, diabetes and high blood pressure. Aerobic exercise (exercise that uses oxygen to provide energy to large muscles) raises your heart and breathing rates, which help your heart to work more efficiently at rest as well as during physical activity. Vigorous, regular physical activity such as brisk walking, jogging and swimming also condition your lungs.

Even mild activities, if done daily, can help. You can benefit from simple things like walking, gardening, housework or dancing. Talk to your doctor about getting started, especially if you've been inactive.

Managing Your Weight

What Are the Keys to Healthy Weight Loss?

Losing weight and keeping it off is a challenge for most of us. As the statistics show, you are not alone in the battle against weight gain. Each person is different, however, and so are the unique factors you have to consider in choosing how to manage your weight. For long-term success, you need to find a strategy that works for you and your personal lifestyle.

The bottom line is simple: To lose weight, you must take in fewer calories than you use up through metabolic functions and physical activity. To do that consistently over time, you need to take three key steps. All three steps are necessary and will overlap as you lose pounds and then learn to maintain a healthy body weight.

Keys Steps to Success

- 1. Think Smart.** How you think shapes how you act. Understanding how you support or sabotage your efforts to change is a crucial part of an effective weight-loss program.
- 2. Eat Well.** Good nutrition and safe weight loss go hand in hand. Learn how to make a successful transition from your current eating habits to a healthful and balanced eating plan.
- 3. Move More.** Regular physical activity is vitally important for good health. It's also the best way to break the yo-yo dieting cycle and keep the weight off for good.

How Do You Maintain Weight Loss?

Get your head working and the middle will take care of itself!

The key to losing weight and keeping it off is to understand what really motivates you. Once you've felt the initial excitement of losing the first few pounds, you must find a way to turn that enthusiasm into the willpower to stick with your eating plan. You will encounter both ups and downs as you learn to maintain your weight. To help you through the downs, you need coping strategies. Think about what you really want to achieve. That desire will help you turn your eating and exercise strategies into a lifestyle that leads to lifelong weight control.

- **Ask Questions.** What gives you the strength to resist temptation? Can you form new habits that you can live with forever? What are the rewards of weight loss for you? How much do you want those rewards?
- **Get Real.** Losing 1 to 2 pounds a week is a realistic goal. Don't burden yourself with unrealistic expectations. Talk with your healthcare professional to determine a healthy goal weight.
- **Stay Balanced.** To maintain your weight, you must balance your intake of calories with the energy you burn. Just the difference of one 12-ounce soda (150 calories) versus at least 30 minutes of brisk walking on most days can add or subtract about 10 pounds to your weight each year!
- **Step Up to the Challenge.** Strap on a pedometer and find out how many steps you take each day. Gradually add just 250 steps per day averaged out over the week. That will give you a good start on a healthy routine of physical activity. Most sedentary adults take only 2,500 to 3,500 steps a day. Aim to add between 4,000 to 6,000 to whatever you are doing now, for a total of 10,000 or more each day. The more steps you take, the better.

- **Shop Smart.** Start your food control at the grocery store. Shop on a full stomach, use a list, read the labels on every food you buy, and skip any food that is not part of your chosen eating plan.
- **Take Notes.** As you plan your eating and activity strategies, keep records. What types of foods are you eating? How do the calories add up? How much are you moving? As you lose weight, record what works for you and what doesn't. Review your notes so you can change strategies if needed.
- **Weigh Less.** Don't get on the scales every day. Once a week is fine. Try measuring inches lost instead of pounds.
- **Plan Ahead.** Plan your meals, plan for ups and downs, plan for holidays and plan to feel great when you've made health a daily habit. If you can do what's right 75 percent of the time, you're going to succeed in the long run!

What About Fad Diets? Fad diets can be nutrition nightmares that shouldn't be sustained over time. Eating a balanced diet every day is the best way to maintain a healthy weight and prevent illness and disease. You may have tried several times before to lose weight, but without much long-term success. That's no reason to feel bad about yourself — losing weight is not easy. No magic formula will trim away extra pounds and keep them off. Gimmicks and get-thin-quick schemes don't work. That's why, over the long haul, fad diets are not the answer.

How Smoking Affects Cholesterol

Smoking is the single most preventable cause of death in the United States. Tobacco smoke is one of the six major controllable risk factors for heart disease (along with high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, being overweight and physical inactivity). If you smoke **and** have high cholesterol, that's two major controllable risk factors you need to work on. Exposure to other people's smoke increases the risk of heart disease even for nonsmokers.

Higher levels of HDL (good) cholesterol may reduce your risk of heart disease, but smoking has been shown to lower HDL (good) cholesterol levels. Smoking also decreases your tolerance for physical activity, making it harder to get the activity you need to help you reach healthy cholesterol levels.

The good news is that when you stop smoking — no matter how long or how much you've smoked — your risk of heart disease and stroke starts to drop. It's cut in half after one year without smoking, then continues to decline until it's as low as a nonsmoker's risk. And if you don't smoke, avoid exposure to secondhand smoke.