Eating for Heart Health

Diet, as most people know, is a big component of healthy living. When it comes to living with chronic conditions, having the right diet becomes even more important, as the foods you eat can make a huge difference not only in the symptoms you experience day to day, but also in the way your chronic conditions progress over time.

With the right diet, you can take control of your health by helping to slow or even reverse your chronic conditions. This guide will provide the essential tools you need to start eating your way to heart health.

What is a Heart Healthy Diet?

The two main goals of a heart-healthy diet is to stop the worsening of your heart disease and to decrease your chances of having serious complications (such as a heart attack or stroke). In general, a heart healthy diet is one that:

❖ **Lowers LDL**
  Bad cholesterol...“L as in Lousy”
❖ **Raises HDL**
  Good cholesterol...“H as in Healthy”
❖ **Lowers blood pressure**
❖ **Lowers blood sugar**
❖ **Maintains a healthy weight.**

Steps to a Heart Healthy Diet

In general, to follow a heart healthy diet means to eat foods that are:

1. Low in **bad fats** (saturated and trans fats)
2. Rich in **beneficial fats** (such as omega-3 fats)
3. Low in **added sugars**
4. Low in **sodium**

Getting the Right Nutrients

You may be eating plenty of food, but your body may not be getting all the nutrients it needs to be healthy. Nutrient-rich foods have minerals, protein, whole grains, and other nutrients but are lower in calories. Because of this, they can help you control your weight, improve your cholesterol, and improve your blood pressure.

Components of a Heart Healthy Diet

➢ A variety of **fruits** and **vegetables**
➢ **Whole grains**
➢ **Low-fat dairy** products
➢ **Skinless** poultry and fish
➢ **Nuts** and legumes
➢ Non-tropical vegetable oils (such as **olive oil**)

Foods and beverages (such as soda) that are high in calories but low on nutrients are called “**empty calories**” and should be avoided when possible.

Tip: When shopping, get in the habit of checking the Nutrition Facts labels, as they can give you an idea of how healthy or unhealthy the food is.

Making Smart Food Choices

Eating a heart healthy diet is not as hard as you may think. The important thing to remember is that it's the overall pattern of your food choices that counts. This means that whatever your diet is like today, **it's never too late to start making healthier choices tomorrow.**

The following are recommendations made by the American Heart Association which can serve as a practical guide to help you make the best food choices, every day.

When to Enjoy

➢ Eat a variety of fresh, frozen and canned **vegetables** and **fruits** without high-calorie sauces or added salt and sugars. **Replace high-calorie foods with fruits and vegetables.**

➢ When choosing carbohydrates, select foods that are made with **whole grains**, as they contain healthy nutrients and fiber.

➢ Choose **poultry** and **fish without skin** and prepare them in healthy ways (**grilled** or **baked**). If you choose to eat meat, look for the leanest cuts available and prepare them in healthy and delicious ways with **low-salt seasonings.**

➢ Eat a variety of fish at least **twice a week**, especially **oily fish** containing **omega-3 fatty acids** (for example, salmon, trout, sardines, and herring).

➢ Select **fat-free** (skim) and **low-fat** (1%) dairy products.

When to Be Careful

➢ Avoid foods containing the words "**partially hydrogenated vegetable oils"** to reduce harmful trans fat in your diet.

➢ Limit **saturated fat** and **trans fat** and replace them with healthier fats (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated). To lower your blood cholesterol, reduce saturated fat to no more than **5% to 6% of your total calories**.

- ◆ For someone eating 2,000 calories a day, that's about 13 grams of saturated fat.

➢ Cut back on beverages and foods with **added sugars.**

➢ Choose foods with less **sodium** and prepare foods with little or no **salt**. To lower blood pressure, aim to eat no more than **2,000 to 2,400 mg of sodium per day**. Reducing daily intake even further to 1,500 mg is desirable, because it can lower blood pressure even further.

- ◆ If you can't meet these goals right now, even reducing your sodium intake by 1,000 mg per day can noticeably benefit your blood pressure!

➢ If you drink **alcohol**, drink in moderation.

- ◆ "Moderation" =
  - o 1 drink per day for women
  - o 2 drinks per day for men