





Your guide to heart-healthy eating

How to choose the right foods
for your best health



You're probably aware how important good nutrition is for good health. You may have tried to make changes to your diet in the past. But with so many different food choices available, knowing what to eat — and what to avoid — can become confusing.

This guide is meant to give you the knowledge and confidence to make better food choices. By doing so, you'll help protect against heart disease and live a healthier lifestyle.

Why choosing healthy foods is so important

The foods you eat have a direct impact on your health and quality of life. When you eat nutrient-packed, healthy foods, you give your body the best fuel possible. You feel better. You help lower your risk of chronic disease. And you potentially live longer.

Healthy eating feeds a healthy heart

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States. Some risk factors, including your age and family history of heart disease, are out of your control. But by eating healthy, you can help improve other key risk factors:

- Blood pressure
- Cholesterol levels
- Weight
- Diabetes

Four steps toward a healthier you



Eat healthfully



Quit smoking



Get enough sleep



Exercise regularly



Food for thought

To make healthy food choices and stick with them, it's important to remember a few things:

- Healthy eating isn't a diet — it's a lifestyle. Don't think of a heart-healthy eating plan as one that denies you the foods you love. Think of it as adding fresh, whole foods like fruits and vegetables that your body craves to perform at its best.
- Life is better with the occasional treat. It's unrealistic to go without any indulgences, such as desserts. The key is to enjoy them in moderation — maybe in smaller portions once or twice a week.
- It's okay to make gradual changes to your eating plan. The goal is to feel comfortable and to make changes that you can stick with for the long term.
- Remember that a variety of healthy foods is important. No single food has all the nutrients that your body needs.
- Make healthy eating a family affair! When you share nutritious meals with a loved one, you're more likely to stay committed to a heart-healthy eating plan.
- The information in this guide is meant to give you a general overview on healthy eating, but you may have special dietary needs. Be sure to talk to your doctor before you make any changes to your diet.



So, what should I eat?

The big three: carbs, proteins and fats

The three major nutrients found in foods are carbohydrates, proteins and fats. These nutrients, called macronutrients, give your body the energy it needs to perform daily activities.

Your body needs all three macronutrients because it uses each type for different purposes. You may have heard that you should watch your fats and/or carbs, but the fact is they are essential for good health. The key lies in choosing the *right* fats and carbs.

One thing to note is that very rarely does a food contain only one macronutrient. Most foods are a mixture of two macronutrients, or all three. That's why you'll see some foods listed more than once in the sections below. Beans, for example, are a great source of carbs *and* protein, while nuts are a great source of fat *and* protein. On the other hand, olive oil is a healthy fat with no protein or carbohydrates.

Choosing the right carbs

Carbohydrates give your body its most important and immediate source of fuel. Carbs are broken down into glucose (sugar), which is absorbed into your bloodstream and carried to cells where it's converted into energy.

The best carbohydrate choices are the ones that give your body sustained energy, rather than a quick burst followed by a crash. When you eat healthy carbs like vegetables or whole grains, your body gets the fuel it needs, and your blood sugar levels stay in a healthy range. "Bad" carbs, on the other hand, raise your blood sugar levels quickly and may make you feel sluggish. If your blood sugar levels are consistently too high, your risk for serious health problems may increase, especially if you have diabetes.

Talk to your doctor about the best carbs for your needs, but the following list will give you an idea of which carbs to eat and which ones to avoid:



Healthy carbs

Healthy carbs include unprocessed or minimally processed whole foods, such as:

Vegetables

- Fruits
- Beans
- Whole grains
 - Whole-grain bread, pasta and cereals
 - Oats
 - Brown rice
 - Wild rice
 - Rye
 - Barley
 - Quinoa

Healthy carbs all deliver vitamins, minerals, and **fiber**, which is the part of carbohydrates that can't be digested. Fiber helps you:

- Feel full
- Achieve a healthy weight
- Regulate bowel movements
- Lower cholesterol
- Control blood sugar levels
- Reduce the risk of heart disease and diabetes

“Bad” carbs

Unhealthy carbs include highly processed and/or high-sugar foods, such as:

- Refined “white” grains (bread, buns, rolls, pancakes, muffins, pasta, etc.)
- High-sugar cereals
- French fries
- Pastries
- Cakes
- Pies
- Brownies
- Cookies
- Chips
- Sodas
- Fruit juices

Become a protein “pro”

Protein is found in every cell in your body. It gives structure to your muscles, tissues, organs and bones, and it's the foundation of healthy skin, hair and nails. Your body uses protein to grow and repair cells, digest food, carry nutrients and oxygen around the body, and support other important processes. Your body needs protein on a daily basis, and since it cannot store it, you need to eat protein-rich foods every day.



Healthy protein sources

- Seafood
- Legumes, such as beans, lentils and chickpeas
- Seeds, nuts and nut butters
- Chicken and turkey
- Low-fat dairy, such as Greek yogurt, milk and cottage cheese
- Eggs
- Some grains, such as wheat germ and quinoa

“Bad” protein sources

Highly processed meats and red meats can increase the risk of cancer, according to the World Health Organization, while other studies show that they can increase the risk of heart disease. It's best to limit the following:

- Bacon
- Sausage
- Hot dogs
- Ham and other highly processed cold cuts
- Fried chicken and fried seafood, which can contain harmful trans fats

The skinny on fats

Dietary fats are the third essential nutrient your body needs on a daily basis. In the past, low-fat diets were recommended, but research now shows that fats should make up between 25 and 35 percent of your daily calories. The key is to choose “good” fats over “bad” fats.

Your body needs healthy fats for a number of reasons. They help form cell membranes, and they help you absorb nutrients and vitamins. They protect your heart and lower your risk for disease, and they're also good for your emotional health. In addition, your body burns fat as energy after it's used up your supply of carbs, often during exercise. Good fats also help raise your HDL (“good”) cholesterol, the type of cholesterol that removes “bad” LDL cholesterol from your arteries.

Unsaturated fats — enjoy frequently

The healthiest fats for your body are unsaturated fats. They are mostly plant-based, with the important exception of fatty fish, which are the best source of the type of unsaturated fat known as omega-3 fatty acids. Research suggests that omega-3 fatty acids can help prevent heart disease, strokes, memory loss and depression.

Your best sources:

- Fish, especially sustainably harvested salmon, tuna, sardines, anchovies, herring, mackerel, lake trout and other fatty fish
- Olive oil
- Olives
- Avocados
- Nuts, especially walnuts
- Seeds, especially flaxseeds
- Flaxseed oil
- Peanut oil
- Sesame oil

Saturated fats — enjoy in moderation

Saturated fats are mostly found in animal-based foods such as milk, yogurt, cheese, butter and meat. New research suggests that these types of fats may not raise blood cholesterol or contribute to heart disease as much as was once thought. However, saturated fats may carry a greater risk for some people than others. Talk to your doctor to find out the amount of saturated fat that's best for you.

Your best sources:

- Yogurt (choose Greek yogurt or other options low in sugar)
- Cheese
- Cottage cheese
- Butter
- Low-fat milk
- Coconut oil

Artificial trans fats — avoid as much as possible

Artificial trans fats are man-made fats that are used in many processed foods to extend their shelf life. Research shows that these fats raise bad cholesterol, lower good cholesterol and can increase your risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes. Because artificial trans fats are so unhealthy, the FDA ruled that they will no longer be allowed in the food supply starting in 2018.

Until then, be careful of the following foods where trans fats are often found:

- Commercially-baked goods (cookies, crackers, cakes, biscuits, muffins, pie crusts, pizza dough, breads like hamburger buns)
- Packaged snack foods (crackers, microwave popcorn, chips, candy)

- Solid fats (stick margarine, vegetable shortening, lard)
- Fried foods
- Fast food
- Pre-mixed products (cake mix, pancake, chocolate milk)
- Anything with “partially hydrogenated” oil listed in the ingredients

Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a type of fat found in your blood that your body needs to function properly. Since your body makes all of the cholesterol it needs, you don't have to include this type of fat in your diet. However, some foods that contain cholesterol, particularly eggs, are important for other nutrients, such as protein.

In the past, a high-cholesterol diet was thought to raise LDL (“bad”) blood cholesterol levels, but research now suggests that dietary cholesterol doesn't have as much of an impact as was once thought. Talk to your doctor to find out the amount of dietary cholesterol that's right for you.

What do you have on your plate?

What percentage of your daily calories should come from carbs, fats and protein? According to the Dietary Guidelines for America, about 45 to 65 percent of your daily calories should come from carbohydrates; 25 to 35 percent from fats, and 10 to 35 percent from protein.

A note on salt

The need for salt differs for everyone. Talk to your doctor to find out the amount of salt you need in your diet.