

Good nutrition for the heart

What you need to know

Good nutrition is very important for maintaining a healthy heart. Some of the most important nutritional factors to be aware of are:

- **Dietary Fats:** play an essential part in the body but some fats can contribute to heart disease. Saturated fats in food can raise cholesterol in the blood, increasing the risk of heart disease. Unsaturated fats (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated including the omega-3 polyunsaturated fats found in fish) all lower the risk of heart disease. People with high blood cholesterol levels should also limit foods high in cholesterol, such as offal (e.g. brains, kidneys, liver), prawns, squid and eggs.
- **Soluble fibre:** is one type of fibre found in some plant foods (e.g. oats, barley and legumes), which helps to reduce cholesterol levels in the blood.
- **Folate:** is a B vitamin that can help to lower the level of a substance in the blood called homocysteine. Homocysteine may be linked to a higher risk of heart disease. Folate is found in many fruit and vegetables, wholegrain cereals, nuts and seeds.
- **Antioxidants:** (e.g. vitamin C and E) derived from fresh fruits, vegetables, wholegrain foods, seeds, some oils and nuts are important in maintaining a healthy heart.
- **Salt (sodium):** when eaten in excess, can contribute to high blood pressure, which is a risk factor for heart disease.
- **Alcohol:** up to two standard drinks a day may reduce the risk of heart disease, but alcohol in excess does not. Too much alcohol can raise blood pressure and triglycerides (a type of fat in the blood), and increase the risk of becoming overweight.

Another very important point is to achieve a good balance between physical activity and food intake, to ensure you maintain a healthy weight.

What to eat

- Base your meals around vegetables, fruit, wholegrain breads and cereals, rice, pasta and noodles. Also aim to eat more legumes (e.g. lentils, split peas, kidney beans, chickpeas, bean mix, baked beans etc). This will ensure you get plenty of fibre, folate, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals – all needed for a healthy heart.
- Eat fish at least twice a week (fresh or canned).



- Reduce saturated fat in your diet by:
 - Choosing lean cuts of meat, skinless poultry, low fat dairy foods (e.g. low or reduced fat milk, cheese and yoghurt) and low fat ice cream. Alternatively, try a calcium fortified soy beverage in place of milk if desired.
 - Using polyunsaturated or monounsaturated spreads instead of butter. For cooking and salad oils, choose polyunsaturated oils (e.g. soybean and sunflower) and monounsaturated oils (e.g. canola and olive).
 - Using healthy cooking methods (e.g. grilling, baking and stir-frying instead of deep-frying).
- Avoid adding salt to meals and choose salt reduced products (e.g. salt reduced sauces, stock and canned products) where available.

Practical tips

- Combine a healthy mix of the different types of unsaturated fats. For example, use canola or soybean oil in cooking, and canola, olive or sunflower oil in salad dressings.
- For snacks, choose fruit (fresh, canned or dried) and unsalted nuts.
- Limit those takeaway and snack foods that are high in saturated fat (e.g. pies, hamburgers, pastries, pizzas, creamy pasta dishes, chips, creamy biscuits, potato crisps, cakes).
- Make it a habit to read food labels and food information panels to detect the saturated fat and salt in foods.
- Instead of salt, use a variety of herbs, spices, citrus juices, vinegars or wine in your cooking to make food tastier.
- Explore ways to increase your regular daily activity, such as walking the last kilometer to work, taking the stairs instead of the lift and participating in regular recreational exercise. Aim to do 30 minutes or more of moderate intensity physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. This will protect the heart in many ways, including helping you maintain a healthy weight.



Your Goals

To improve my 'healthy heart' eating habits, I will by/...../.....



The Dietitians Association of Australia endorses this nutrition guide and participated in its development as part of our work towards better food, better health and better living for all Australians. We are the largest professional nutrition-focused body in Australia. For general nutrition information, please visit www.daa.asn.au. For expert nutrition and dietary advice we recommend you contact an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD). To find one near you, call our hotline 1800 812 942, visit www.daa.asn.au or look in the Yellow Pages under 'Dietitians'.