

IN THE KNOW ABOUT NUTRITION

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Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service-Lubbock County * PO Box 10536 * Lubbock, TX 79408
 916 Main, Suite 201 Lubbock, TX 79401 * 775-1740 * Fax 775-1758 * <http://lubbock.agrilife.org>



Love Your Heart



A healthy diet and lifestyle are your best weapons to fight cardiovascular disease. It's not as hard as you may think! You just have to make these simple steps part of your life for long-term benefits to your health and your heart.

What is heart disease?

Heart disease is the # 1 cause of death in the United States. The term "heart disease" refers to several types of heart conditions. The most common type is coronary artery disease, which can cause heart attacks. Other kinds of heart disease may involve the valves in the heart, or the heart may not pump well and cause heart failure. Some people are born with heart disease. Anyone can be at risk for heart disease and having high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or diabetes can also increase your risk for heart disease. You can take several steps to reduce your risk of heart disease such as maintaining a healthy weight, eat a healthy diet, exercise more, and stop smoking.



Steps for a heart healthy lifestyle:

1. Control your portion size

How much you eat is just as important as what you eat. Overloading your plate, taking seconds and eating until you feel stuffed can lead to eating more calories than you should. Portions served in restaurants are often more than anyone needs. Use a small plate or bowl to help control your portions. Eat larger portions of low-calorie, nutrient-rich foods, such as fruits and vegetables, and smaller portions of high-calorie, high-sodium foods, such as refined, processed or fast foods. This strategy can shape up your diet as well as your heart and waistline.

2. Eat more fruits and vegetables

Vegetables and fruits are good sources of vitamins and minerals. Vegetables and fruits are also low in calories and rich in dietary fiber. Vegetables and fruits contain substances found in plants that may help prevent cardiovascular disease. Eating more fruits and vegetables may help you eat less high-fat foods, such as meat, cheese and snack foods. Try to fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables at each meal.

3. Select whole grains

Whole grains are good sources of fiber and other nutrients that play a role in regulating blood pressure and heart health. You can increase the amount of whole grains in a heart-healthy diet by making simple substitutions for refined grain products. Or be adventuresome and try a new whole grain such as farro quinoa or barley. Try to fill 1/4 of your plate with whole-grains or carbohydrates at each meal.

4. Limit unhealthy fats

Limiting how much saturated and trans fats you eat is an important step to reduce your blood cholesterol and lower your risk of coronary artery disease. A high blood cholesterol level can lead to a buildup of plaque in your arteries, which can increase your risk of heart attack and stroke. The best way to reduce saturated and trans fats in your diet is to limit the amount of solid fats such as butter, margarine and shortening. You can also reduce the amount of saturated fat in your diet by choosing lean meats with less than 10 percent fat.

5. Choose low-fat protein sources

Lean meat, poultry and fish, low-fat dairy products, and eggs are some of your best sources of protein. But be careful to choose lower fat options, such as

skim milk rather than whole milk and skinless chicken breasts rather than fried chicken patties. Fish is another good alternative to high-fat omega-3 fatty acids, which can lower blood fats called triglycerides.

Legumes such as beans, peas and lentils also are good sources of protein and contain less fat and no cholesterol, making them good substitutes for meat.

6. Reduce your sodium intake

Eating a lot of sodium can contribute to high blood pressure, a risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Reducing sodium is an important part of a heart-healthy diet.

- Healthy adults should have no more than 2,300 milligrams (mg) of sodium/day (about a teaspoon of salt).
- People age 51 or older and people who have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, diabetes or chronic kidney disease should have no more than 1,500 mg of sodium/day.

Reducing the amount of salt you add to food at the table or while cooking is a good first step, much of the salt you eat comes from canned or processed foods, such as soups and frozen dinners. Eating fresh foods and making your own soups and stews can reduce the amount of salt you eat.



Low-salt items to choose:

- Herbs and spices
- Salt substitutes
- Reduced-salt canned soups or prepared meals
- Reduced-salt versions of condiments, such as reduced-salt soy sauce, and reduced-salt ketchup

High-salt items to avoid:

- Table salt
- Canned soups and prepared foods, such as frozen dinners or boxed meals
- Tomato juice
- Soy sauce, and regular ketchup

7. Increase your amount of exercise

Physical activity is anything that makes you move your body and burn calories. This includes things like climbing stairs or playing sports. Aerobic exercises benefit your heart, and include walking, jogging, swimming or biking.

The simplest, positive change you can make to effectively improve your heart health is to start walking. It's enjoyable, free, easy, social and great exercise. A walking program is flexible and boasts high success rates because people can stick with it. It's easy for walking to become a regular and satisfying part of life.

8. Quit smoking

Smoking greatly increases your risk of cardiovascular disease. If you are currently smoking, the best way to avoid developing heart disease is to quit smoking as soon as possible. Also, it is best to avoid second-hand smoke as well.

Sources:

- https://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthyLiving/Diet-and-Lifestyle-Recommendations_UCM_305855_Article.jsp
- <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/in-depth/heart-healthy-diet/art-20047702?pg=2>

Created by: Emily Lipinsky, TTU Dietetic Intern 2016

For More Information contact:
E. Kay Davis, CEA-FCS, Lubbock County, 806-775-1740