

Protect Your Heart: Make Wise Food Choices

Toolkit No. 6

How can food choices help keep my heart and blood vessels healthy?

Diabetes increases your chances of having a heart attack or a stroke. But you can protect your heart and blood vessels by

- eating less of the foods that raise your blood cholesterol and your chances of heart disease
- eating more of the foods that lower your cholesterol and your chances of heart disease

Choosing foods wisely can also help you lose weight and keep your blood glucose (sugar) levels on target.

How can I make wise food choices?

Try these steps to help protect your heart and blood vessels:

- **Eat less fat, especially saturated fat and trans fats, and fewer high-cholesterol foods.** Saturated fat is found in meat, poultry skin, butter, 2% or whole milk, ice cream, cheese, lard, and shortening. You'll also want to cut back on foods that contain palm oil or coconut oil.

Trans fats are produced when liquid oils are turned into solids. This process is called hydrogenation. Cut back on foods that list hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils on the labels. This type of fat is found in crackers and snack foods, baked goods like cookies and donuts, french fries, and stick margarine. Use a soft margarine in place of butter or stick margarine. Look for soft margarine in a tub that lists a liquid oil such as corn, safflower, soybean, or canola oil as the first ingredient.

Egg yolks and organ meats such as liver are high in cholesterol. Check the Nutrition Facts and the list of ingredients on food labels.

- **Choose the kinds of fat that can help lower your cholesterol.** If you use cooking oil, choose olive oil or canola oil. Nuts have a



Making wise food choices can protect your heart and blood vessels.

healthy type of fat as well. Corn oil, sunflower oil, and safflower oil also protect your heart. However, all oils, nuts, and fats are high in calories. If you're trying to lose weight, you'll want to keep servings small.

- **Have fish 2 or 3 times a week.** Albacore tuna, herring, mackerel, rainbow trout, sardines, and salmon are high in omega-3 fatty acids, a type of fat that may help lower blood fat levels and prevent clogging of the arteries.
- **Use special cholesterol-lowering margarine.** Having 2 to 3 tablespoons of a cholesterol-lowering margarine every day can lower your cholesterol. These margarines contain plant stanols or plant sterols, ingredients that keep cholesterol from being absorbed. You'll find several types at the grocery store in the margarine section.

- **Cook with less fat.** You can cut down on total fat by broiling, microwaving, baking, roasting, steaming, or grilling foods. Using nonstick pans and cooking sprays instead of cooking with fat also helps.
- **Eat more foods that are high in fiber.** Foods high in fiber may help lower blood cholesterol. Fiber also can prevent problems with the digestive system such as constipation. Oatmeal, oat bran, dried beans and peas (such as kidney beans, pinto beans, and black-eyed peas), fruits, and vegetables are good sources of fiber.
- **Include more soy protein in your meals and snacks.** Replacing foods high in saturated fat with soy-containing foods may help lower your cholesterol. Foods with soy protein include soybeans, tofu, miso, tempeh, soy nuts, soy milk, textured soy protein, soy protein powder, and items that are made from soybeans, such as burgers.
- **Limit your alcoholic beverage consumption.** Drinking light to moderate amounts of alcohol is associated with a low risk of heart disease, perhaps by raising HDL (good) cholesterol levels. There isn't enough information to recommend that people who don't drink should start drinking alcohol to reduce heart risk. But, for those who do drink alcohol, 1 serving daily for women and up to 2 servings daily for men have been associated with good health. Drinking more than 1 to 2 drinks per day isn't helpful; it contributes unnecessary calories and may actually raise your blood pressure and triglycerides. In addition, it can cause other health problems. It's best to discuss drinking alcohol with your health care provider to find out whether it may be helpful for you.

A day of heart-healthy meals			
Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Between-meal snacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fresh orange sections • oatmeal with 1% milk and raisins • toast with cholesterol-lowering margarine • coffee with 1% milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sliced turkey on whole wheat bread with lettuce and mustard • carrot sticks • cherry tomatoes • fresh apple 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • baked chicken • baked potato with cholesterol-lowering margarine and low-fat sour cream • steamed green beans • tossed salad with low-fat salad dressing • low-fat frozen yogurt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dried fruit • air-popped popcorn • rice cakes with peanut butter

For more help, ask your health care team for copies of these brochures:

- Toolkit No. 7: *Protect Your Heart: Choose Fats Wisely*
- Toolkit No. 8: *Protect Your Heart: Cook with Heart-Healthy Foods*
- Toolkit No. 9: *Protect Your Heart: Check Food Labels to Make Heart-Healthy Choices*

