Toolkit No. 8

Protect Your Heart: Make Smart Food Choices

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

Diabetes raises your chances of having a heart attack or a stroke. But you can protect your heart and blood vessels by taking these steps:

Eat more
- whole grains
- vegetables and fruit
- healthy fats (but not too much)
- fish
- foods with omega-3 fats

Cut back on
- red and processed meats
- cookies, chocolate, ice cream, and other desserts
- salty snacks like chips
- sugary drinks
- cream and solid fats like butter, lard

Making smart food choices can also help you lose weight and keep your blood glucose (sugar) levels on target. Eating smaller servings of your usual foods also can help. For recipes and information about foods, visit diabetes.org/MyFoodAdvisor.

How can I make smart food choices?

Here are some ways to make smart food choices. Put a check mark next to 2 things you'd like to try. Talk with your health care provider for more ideas.

Foods to choose more often

- **Eat more whole grains.** Try to eat whole-grain versions of breads, cereals, crackers, pasta, and other grains at least half of the time.
  - ❑ Check the ingredient list when buying grains. The first ingredient listed should be a whole grain like whole wheat flour, whole rye flour, whole oats, oatmeal, buckwheat flour, whole grain corn, whole grain cornmeal, whole grain barley, bulgur, brown rice, wild rice, or quinoa.
  - ❑ Try whole-wheat pasta instead of regular pasta.
  - ❑ Have brown rice, whole-wheat couscous (a quick-cooking grain), or quinoa instead of white rice.

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

- **Eat more vegetables and fruit.**
  - ❑ Eat at least one vegetable or a salad at lunch and dinner. Snack on raw vegetables.
  - ❑ Try new ways of cooking vegetables, such as steaming, stir-frying, or roasting.
  - ❑ Eat dark green and dark yellow vegetables every day, such as broccoli, spinach, collards, kale, carrots, squash, and peppers.
  - ❑ Choose fruit for dessert or when you crave something sweet.
- **Choose heart-healthy fats.** Choose the kinds of fat that can help lower your cholesterol. But keep in mind that all fats are high in calories. If you're trying to lose weight, you'll want to keep servings small.
  - ❑ Cook with healthy fats. Choose from olive oil, canola oil, corn oil, soybean oil, sunflower oil, and safflower oil.
  - ❑ Have a handful of low-salt nuts for a snack several times a week.
- **Eat more fish.**
  - ❑ Have fish 2 to 3 times a week.

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- **Eat foods with omega-3 fats.**
  - ❑ Add flaxseeds and walnuts to your morning cereal.
  - ❑ Use canola oil, soybean oil, flaxseed oil, or walnut oil.
  - ❑ Eat fish high in omega-3, including albacore tuna, herring, mackerel, rainbow trout, sardines, and salmon.

Foods to cut back on

- **Cut back on foods with saturated fat.**
  - ❑ Eat less butter, whole milk, ice cream, full-fat cheese, and lard.
  - ❑ Choose meats with less fat, such as ground beef with 7% fat instead of 15%, poultry without the skin, and leaner meat cuts such as as pork tenderloin, beef round, chuck roast, or rib roast.
  - ❑ Choose meat substitutes such as beans or "veggie burgers" more often.
  - ❑ Choose lower-fat versions of cheese and milk. For example, try reduced-fat cheddar cheese. If you buy 2% milk now, try 1% milk. If you already use 1% milk, try fat-free milk.
- **Cut back on foods with trans fat.**
  - ❑ Check food labels and avoid trans fat whenever you can.
  - ❑ Watch out for foods that list trans fat, hydrogenated oil, or partially hydrogenated oil on the labels.
  - ❑ Both margarine and butter are high in fat so try to use less of both.
  - ❑ Replace stick margarine with tub or liquid margarine with 0 grams trans fat or use a cholesterol-lowering margarine. Cholesterol-lowering margarines contain an ingredient (called plant sterol esters) that keeps cholesterol from being absorbed.
- **Cut back on high-cholesterol foods.**
  - ❑ Cut back on egg yolks, organ meats such as liver, high-fat dairy products, and high-fat meat and poultry.
  - ❑ Choose packaged foods with little or no cholesterol. Check the Nutrition Facts and the list of ingredients on food labels.
- **Cook using low-fat methods. Use heart-healthy fats.**
  - ❑ Broil, microwave, bake, roast, steam, or grill foods.
  - ❑ Use nonstick pans and use heart-healthy oils like canola, olive, sunflower, or corn oil cooking sprays.
- **Cut back on calories if you need to lose weight.**
  - ❑ Compare your usual daily calories to the total you should have to lose weight. Keep track of what you eat for a day or two. Then go to diabetes.org/MyFoodAdvisor and click on "Explore Foods." Add up your total calories for a day.
- **Cut back on salt (sodium).**
  - ❑ Reduce your sodium intake to 2300 mg. If you have high blood pressure (and diabetes), you should aim for about 1500 mg per day of sodium.
  - ❑ Eat out less.
  - ❑ Choose less processed foods when cooking.
  - ❑ Check food labels for sodium content. You also can check on sodium content online at diabetes.org/MyFoodAdvisor. Click on "Explore Foods."
  - ❑ Add less salt to your food. Try to get used to the taste of food without salt.
  - ❑ Use herbs, spices, or lemon juice instead of salt.

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