

Frequently Asked Questions

Why should I follow a heart healthy diet?

Heart healthy eating when paired with regular physical activity can help to:

- Improve your blood fats (cholesterol and triglycerides)
- Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight
- Reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance found in your blood. Cholesterol is used in small amounts to make hormones and digestive fluids. It is not essential to get cholesterol from your diet as your liver can make what it needs. High blood cholesterol is a risk factor to developing heart disease.

Types of blood cholesterol:

1. Low Density Lipoproteins (LDL), “bad cholesterol”: can form plaque in the arteries leading to blocked blood flow to the heart and brain
2. High Density Lipoproteins (HDL), “good cholesterol”: helps to remove bad, LDL cholesterol from your arteries
3. Triglycerides: are produced from dietary fats, sugar and alcohol. High levels can lead to increased clotting and overall risk of developing heart disease

How can I limit the amount of dietary cholesterol I eat?

Animal foods such as beef, pork, chicken and eggs have cholesterol. Vegetables and other plant-based foods do not contain cholesterol. The amount of saturated fat included in your diet, as well as other dietary patterns, such as eating an overall heart healthy diet have a greater impact on your cardiovascular health (including changes in your LDL cholesterol) than the actual dietary cholesterol you eat. Your goal should be to limit the amount of trans and saturated fat you eat. By limiting foods that have trans fat, or that are high in saturated fat, you will also reduce the total dietary cholesterol you have. Shrimp and shellfish do not need to be limited.

Do you have any tips to get started on a journey to heart healthy eating?

1. Use the new Canada’s food guide to help guide mealtime proportions.
 - Vegetables and fruit: fill ½ of your plate with a variety of vegetables. For dessert have a piece of fruit.
 - Grains: fill ¼ of your plate with grain foods such as rice, pasta or bread. Choose whole grain options such as brown rice, quinoa or whole grain breads more often.

- Meat and alternatives: fill $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate with low fat, low sodium meat and alternatives such as beans or legumes, fish, tofu or 2.5-3oz (roughly the size of your palm and the thickness of a finger) of lean cuts of meat.

Use the picture below as a guide:

**Have plenty of
vegetables and fruits**

Eat protein foods

**Make water
your drink
of choice**



**Choose
whole grain
foods**

Get your copy of the Canada's food guide here: <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

2. Read food labels. Labels are great tools to use to select products that are:

- Lower in:
 - trans fat
 - saturated fat
 - sodium
 - added sugars
- Higher in:
 - fibre

3. Choose your fat sources wisely. Limit foods with trans fat, or that are high in saturated fat such as commercial baked products, deep fried foods and snack foods including chips and cheesies. Aim to include heart healthy, unsaturated fat sources in your diet such as vegetable oils.

4. Eat foods high in soluble fibre such as beans, legumes, psyllium, whole grains, vegetables and fruit. Soluble fibre can lower your risk of heart disease by lowering total and LDL cholesterol levels.

5. Consider replacing animal protein sources with plant-based options a few times a week. This switch will help to reduce your overall intake of saturated fat. For example, try adding $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cup of beans or legumes to salads, soups or stews.

6. Aim to have 2 servings of fatty fish per week. One serving is 100g or 3.5-4oz of fish. Salmon, mackerel, herring, trout, sardines and albacore tuna are high in omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA. Omega-3 fatty acids improve blood cholesterol levels, lower blood pressure and reduce inflammation and risk of sudden cardiac death. Alternative vegetarian options of EPA/DHA include kelp, seaweed and fortified foods such as omega-3 eggs.

7. Aim to have 5 servings of unsalted nuts or seeds per week. A serving size is one cupped hand or $\frac{1}{4}$ cup. Nuts and seeds are great sources of protein, unsaturated fat and fibre. Try adding them to salads, cereal, baking or stir-fries.

8. Limit added sugar. A diet high in sugar can increase triglycerides. Make water your main drink of choice, opt for unsweetened varieties of products and read ingredient labels for added sugar. Other names for added sugar to look for on ingredient labels include brown/white sugar, honey, molasses, fructose or syrup.

9. Be physically active! Aim to get 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per week. You can break this up into sessions of 30 minutes or three 10 minute sessions per day if needed.

The % DV found on the right-hand side of a nutrition facts label indicates whether there is a little, or a lot of a nutrient per listed serving size:

- **5% DV or less** means there is a **little** of a nutrient. Look for 5% DV or less for nutrients you are trying to get less of including trans fat, saturated fat, sodium and added sugar.
- **15% DV or more** means there is a **lot** of a nutrient. Look for 15% DV or more for nutrients you are trying to get more of such as fibre.

You can use % DV to compare the nutrient content of products in order to pick the option that is a healthier choice.

10. Limit alcohol. Men should have no more than 3 drinks per day or a total 15 drinks per week.
Women should have no more than 2 drinks per day or a total of 10 drinks per week.

How many eggs can I have?

If you have high cholesterol levels, heart disease or type 2 diabetes you should eat **no more than 3 to 4 egg yolks per week** as well as limit foods that are high in trans fat, saturated fat and cholesterol. Egg whites include no dietary cholesterol and do not need to be limited.

What types of oils are the best to include in a heart healthy diet?

Canada's food guide recommends having 2 to 3 Tbsp (30 to 45 mL) of unsaturated fat each day. This includes oil in salad dressings, margarine, mayonnaise and the oil used in cooking or baking.

The foods listed below are heart healthy, unsaturated fat sources to include in your diet:

- Vegetable oils including olive, canola, corn, peanut, flaxseed, soybean, avocado and sunflower
- Avocados
- Unsalted nuts and their butters such as almonds, pistachios, cashews, pecans and hazelnuts
- Fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids such as mackerel, albacore tuna, sardines, herring, and salmon
- Unsalted seeds like chia, pumpkin, sesame and sunflower

What kinds of fat should be limited in a heart healthy diet?

Unhealthy fats are saturated (in high amounts) and trans fats.

Saturated fat raises both HDL and LDL cholesterol. Trans fat increases LDL and lowers HDL cholesterol. Aim to get as little trans fat in your diet while limiting foods high in saturated fat.

Examples of foods to limit include:

- Fast foods and deep fried foods
- Foods made with shortening or partially hydrogenated oil
- Snack foods such as chips, nachos, and cheese puffs
- Ready to eat, processed frozen meals including pizza or chicken and meat pies
- Store-bought baked goods such cookies, pies, danishes, muffins, doughnuts and croissants
- Margarine and vegetable shortening made with partially hydrogenated oils
- Ice cream and frozen desserts
- Full fat dairy such as homogenized milk, high fat cheeses (made with 20% milk fat or more), cream, butter or lard
- Coconut oil and palm oil
- High fat processed meats such as sausage, hotdogs, bologna, pepperoni or salami
- Fatty cuts of meat such as prime rib, regular ground meats, and poultry meats with the skin

What types of carbohydrates are the best to eat?

Grain Products are an excellent source of carbohydrates needed to fuel your body. Whole grain carbohydrates are also sources of fibre. **You should aim to have 28-35 grams of fibre per day.** There are two types of fibre: soluble and insoluble. Both types play an important role in a healthy diet.

1. Soluble fibre:

- Can help lower your risk of heart disease by lowering LDL cholesterol levels
- Promotes fullness
- Improves blood sugar control

2. Insoluble fibre:

- Improves digestive health
- Promotes bowel regularity

Examples of soluble fibre sources:

- dried or canned beans or legumes
- whole grains such as oats, oat bran and barley
- cereal with psyllium fibre such as all bran buds
- fresh fruit including avocado, apples, pears, prunes and strawberries
- vegetables such as artichokes, broccoli, brussels sprouts, asparagus, turnip, egg plant carrots, corn or squash
- soy products including soy nuts, tofu and edamame

How much salt or sodium can be included in a heart healthy diet?

If you have high blood pressure, or heart failure it is important to limit the amount of salt or sodium in your diet. **Limit salt to no more than 2300mg per day.**

Here are some tips to lower your salt intake:

- Prepare meals at home. Meals from restaurants or fast food tends to be higher in fat and salt.
- Remove the salt shaker from your dining table.
- Do not use salt in cooking.
- Try seasoning foods with lemon/lime juice, garlic powder, fresh herbs, or spices.
- Eat less processed or cured meats such as bologna, ham, pepperoni, sausage, hot dogs, or bacon.
- Eat less processed or convenience food.
- Choose low sodium varieties when available. This includes canned soups or broths, tomato sauce, condiments such as soy sauce or canned tuna.

Putting it all together:

1. Make these important changes in your diet:
 - Limit trans and saturated fat. Include heart healthy fats.
 - Limit highly processed foods.
 - Eat more fibre.
 - Eat more vegetables and fruit.
 - Eat less salt and sodium.
 - Make water your main drink of choice.
2. Use the Canada’s food guide to help guide meal time proportions and be mindful of portion sizes
3. Use the chart below to pick heart healthy options:

Foods Recommended	Foods NOT Recommended
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Home cooked meals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Restaurant prepared or take out food
Meat and Alternatives	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Peas, beans, and legumes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organ meats such as liver or kidney
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fish, especially fatty fish such as herring, trout, mackerel, albacore tuna, salmon or sardines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deep fried meats including chicken wings or battered fish
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lean cuts of beef including sirloin tip, inside, outside and eye of round, top sirloin, strip-loin, flank and cross rib. With visible fat removed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cuts of meat with visible fat left on during cooking or lots of marbling
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Eggs whites or substitutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More than 4 egg yolks per week
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leaner cuts of pork include: leg butt portion roast, picnic shoulder roast, loin, tenderloin end roast and centre-cut loin roast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cold cut meats, bacon, sausage, pepperoni or hotdogs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Skinless poultry (Choose white meat more often than dark) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Poultry with the skin left on
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Extra lean or lean ground meats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Regular or medium ground meats
Milk and Alternatives	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Skim, or 1% milk fat (M.F.) milk, yogurt or cottage cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Full fat milk and dairy products

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheeses less than 20% M.F. (Be mindful of portion sizes. A serving of cheese is 50g/ 1.5oz) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheeses over 20% M.F.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fortified, unsweetened soy beverage 	
Vegetables and Fruit	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All, except coconut and battered or deep fried vegetables 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coconut • Battered or deep fried vegetables
Grain Products	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grain bread, cereal, pasta or rice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial baked goods such as muffins, cookies, danishes, cakes, donuts or croissants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low fat snacks such as air popped popcorn or low sodium pretzels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High fat snack foods such as potato chips and cheesies
Oils and Fat	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Olive, canola, avocado, soybean, peanut and other vegetable oils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coconut or palm oil
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salad dressings such as oil and vinegar or other low fat varieties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cream cheese, creamy salad dressings or full fat mayonnaise
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular sauces and gravies
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Butter, cream, lard or shortening

Resources for heart healthy recipes:

1. Heart and stroke <https://www.heartandstroke.ca/get-healthy/recipes>
2. Unlock food (Dietitians of Canada) <https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Recipes.aspx>
3. American Heart Association <https://recipes.heart.org/en>
4. Diabetes Canada <https://www.diabetes.ca/en-CA/nutrition---fitness/recipes?Categories=&MealType=&SearchText=&Sort=&Page=1>
5. Health Canada <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guide/tips-healthy-eating/meal-planning-cooking-healthy-choices/recipes.html>

Questions? Reach out to one of our Registered Dietitians:

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HOW ARE WE DOING?

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Niagara Health Clinical
Nutrition services at:*

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