

Love your Heart Love your Food!

February is National Heart month. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in America. Many of these deaths and risk factors are preventable. And food choices have a big impact on your heart's health, even if you have other risk factors.

Only a few risk factors, such as age, gender, and family history, cannot be controlled. Talk to your health care provider to find out if you are at high risk for heart disease.

You can help prevent and control many risk factors of heart disease, such as high blood cholesterol and high blood pressure with lifestyle changes and medicines. Healthy food choices and an active lifestyle can have a big impact on your heart's health.

If you are at high risk for heart disease or already have heart disease, meet with a registered dietitian nutritionist. Together with your health care provider, your RDN can help you lower your risk or improve your existing condition by developing a personalized eating and lifestyle plan.

Just a few steps and you can be on your way to a healthier heart!

Step 1: Make Healthy Food Choices

Making healthy food choices starts by eating a variety of nutrient dense foods. Eat more fruit, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and fatty fish. Aim to fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables and eat salmon, lake trout, albacore tuna, mackerel, or sardines twice a week. Legumes including beans and lentils are great sources of fiber and pack a punch of protein. Not only are they heart-healthy, but they're also very affordable as well. Choose whole-grain foods most often and minimize refined grain foods.

Eat less foods that have added salt, sugars, and fats. Reduce salt intake by preparing foods at home so you can control the amount of sodium in your meals. As you prepare meals, use as little salt as possible. You can cut at least half the salt from most recipes. As you shop, select reduced-sodium or no-salt-added canned soups and vegetables. Avoid clear of trans fats and limit your intake of saturated fat.

Step 2: Be Active

Regular, moderate physical activity lowers blood pressure and helps your body control stress and weight. Be physically active in your own way. Start by doing what you can, at least 10 minutes at a time. You should aim to get at least 30 minutes of exercise every day. Always check with your physician before beginning a workout regimen.

Step 3: Manage Stress

Yoga, ping pong, walking, jogging, meditation, dancing wildly to the oldies – whatever works for you, figure out a way to reduce life's stresses!

Step 4: Don't Smoke

Smoking increases your risk for heart disease. If you smoke, quit.

Sources: Eatright.org and USDA.