

## Heart Healthy Eating Guide

لعربيةة تغللاب ابضاً متوفر  
Also available in Arabic: (AR85-2279)

Aussi disponible en français :  
Guide alimentaire pour un cœur en santé (FF85-1953)



[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

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# Heart Healthy Eating Guide

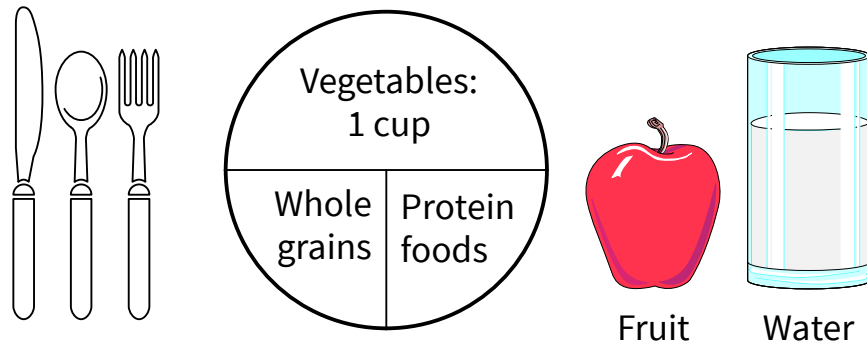
## What is heart healthy eating?

- Heart healthy eating means having a balance of nutritious **whole foods in your meals**.
- Whole foods are foods that have not been highly processed or refined.
- A balance of whole, nutritious foods includes a mix of:
  - › Fruits and vegetables
  - › Whole grains
  - › Lean proteins (like skinless chicken or Greek yogurt)
  - › Plant-based proteins (like tofu, chickpeas, or soybeans)
- What you eat affects your heart health and your overall health.
- Healthy eating can lower your risk of heart disease by:
  - › improving your cholesterol levels.
  - › lowering your blood pressure.
  - › managing your body weight.
  - › controlling your blood glucose (sugar).

## What can I do to eat heart healthy?

- Make meals at home using fresh, whole foods.
  - › Eat fewer processed foods.
  - › Choose whole foods.
  - › Choosing fewer processed and more whole foods will help you get the most nutrition.
  - › Nutrients can be lost through food processing. Processed foods often have added sugar, salt, and fat.
- Be mindful.
  - › People eat for many reasons other than hunger. Listen to your body and try to only eat when you have a physical need for food.
  - › Eat slowly and enjoy your food.
  - › Pay attention to the look, smell, and taste of your food while you are eating it.

- › Limit distractions when you are eating (for example: put your phone down or turn off the TV while you are eating).
- › If you are used to skipping meals, you may need to start eating regular meals to reset your body's hunger cues (know when you are feeling hungry).
- Fill half your plate with vegetables.
  - › Eating more vegetables lowers blood pressure.
- Choose foods higher in fibre.
- Balance your meals to keep you feeling full longer.
  - › Make sure each meal has a source of protein and a source of fibre.



- Use less sugar, salt, and fat when making meals.
  - › Use herbs and spices instead of salt when cooking.
  - › Enjoy vegetables and fruit without added salt or sugar.
  - › Drain and rinse canned vegetables and fruit.
  - › Use smaller amounts of condiments (like ketchup, mustard, soy sauce, mayonnaise, butter, and margarine).
- Choose proteins from plants more often.
  - › Plant-based proteins have more fibre and less saturated fat than animal-based proteins.
  - › Some good choices for plant-based proteins are:
 

Nuts	Lentils
Seeds	Beans
Peas	Soy products
- Choose fatty fish 2 times each week.
  - › Fatty fish are sources of omega-3 fatty acids. Some examples of fatty fish are:
 

Salmon	Sardines
Mackerel	Trout

- Drink water when you are thirsty.
  - › Avoid drinks with added sugars (like pop, juice, sports drinks, chocolate milk, and energy drinks).
- Ask your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) about cannabis and alcohol use.
  - › Cannabis can raise your risk of heart disease.
  - › Alcohol can raise your blood pressure, weight, and triglycerides (a type of fat in your blood).
  - › For information about how to lower the risks from drinking alcohol, see Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines:  
[www.ccsa.ca/more-6-drinks-week-puts-your-health-risk-new-canadas-guidance-alcohol-and-health](http://www.ccsa.ca/more-6-drinks-week-puts-your-health-risk-new-canadas-guidance-alcohol-and-health)
- Ask your primary health care provider about the Mediterranean diet.
  - › The Mediterranean diet focuses on foods from plant sources with little processing, healthy fats, and enjoying meals with others. This diet has been shown to lower the risk of heart problems.
  - › Make fruits and the main part of your meals and snacks.
  - › Eat beans, legumes, nuts, and whole grains every day.
  - › Cook with olive or avocado oil instead of butter.
  - › Eat more lean meat. For example, choose fish more often and eat less red meat.
  - › Eat fruit for dessert. Limit sweets and added sugar.
  - › Ask your dietitian for more information on the Mediterranean diet or visit:  
<https://oldwayspt.org/traditional-diets/mediterranean-diet>

## Other things that can affect your food choices

### Sleep

- Research has shown that sleep has a large effect on your health.
- Not getting enough sleep can affect the hormones that control hunger and stimulate (increase) your appetite.
- Try to go to bed and get up at about the same time every day.
- Sleep in a dark, cool room.
- Limit screen time (like TV or your phone) for at least an hour before bed.

### Stress

- Stress can change how much and how often you eat. Sometimes, it can make you want to skip a meal, or not eat it all.
- Stress triggers hormones that can make you feel hungry when you are not. It can cause distracted or emotional eating (using food as a comfort).
- Stress has many other harmful effects on your health. Stress cannot always be lowered or avoided, but you can learn to manage it.

### Managing your stress

These resources may help you manage your stress.

- Canadian Mental Health Association – What’s Your Stress Index?
  - › <https://cmha.ca/whats-your-stress-index>
- Health Canada: Mental Health — Coping With Stress
  - › [www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/healthy-living/your-health/lifestyles/your-health-mental-health-coping-stress-health-canada-2008.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/healthy-living/your-health/lifestyles/your-health-mental-health-coping-stress-health-canada-2008.html)
- Heart and Stroke
  - › [www.heartandstroke.ca/get-healthy/reduce-stress](http://www.heartandstroke.ca/get-healthy/reduce-stress)
- HelpGuide
  - › Useful tips for dealing with emotional stress
  - › [www.helpguide.org/home-pages/stress.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/home-pages/stress.htm)
- ISMAUK (International Stress Management Association of the United Kingdom)
  - › [www.isma.org.uk](http://www.isma.org.uk)

- Mental Wellness (includes stress reduction techniques):
  - › <https://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation/MentalWellness#s-lg-box-15902020>
- Physical Activity (importance of moving your body to reduce stress):
  - › <https://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation/PhysicalActivity>

## Sodium (salt)

- Salt is the main source of sodium in our food.
- Eating too much sodium can raise your blood pressure and risk of stroke and kidney disease.
- Try to limit sodium to no more than 2000 mg a day (**1 tsp of salt** is equal to **2300 mg of sodium**).
- Sea salt, kosher salt, and pink Himalayan salt all have the **same amount of sodium as table salt**.

## Tips to help limit salt

- Prepare your meals at home from whole, natural foods.
- Buy unprocessed fresh and frozen foods, when possible.
- Replace salt with herbs and spices when cooking.
- Choose whole vegetables instead of vegetable juices (like V8® Original 100% Vegetable Juice, carrot juice, or tomato juice).
- Take the salt shaker off the table.
- Check food labels for sodium (see page 11 for more information on how to read a food label).
- Choose “no salt added” canned products over products labelled “low sodium” and “reduced sodium”.
- Foods with labels that say “low sodium” and “reduced sodium” may still have too much sodium, so it is best to always check the label.
- Drain and rinse salted canned products.

## **Fibre**

- Fibre is only found in plant-based foods. There are 2 types of fibre:
  - › **Soluble fibre**
  - › **Insoluble fibre**
- It is important to eat a mix of plant-based foods to have both types of fibre.

### **Soluble fibre**

- Soluble fibre:
  - › lowers cholesterol levels.
  - › helps control blood sugar levels.
  - › helps manage diarrhea (loose, watery poop).

### **Sources of soluble fibre**

- › Pulses (like beans, lentils, and chickpeas)
- › Oats
- › Psyllium
- › Ground flaxseed and chia seeds
- › Some fruits (like berries and applesauce)

### **Insoluble fibre**

- Insoluble fibre helps you feel full.
- It also helps keep your bowel movements (poops) regular.
- Sometimes insoluble fibre is called “roughage.”

### **Sources of insoluble fibre**

- › Fruit and vegetables (especially skins and seeds)
- › Whole grains
- › Bran (wheat and oat)
- › Nuts and seeds



## **Tips to help you eat more fibre**

- Eat more whole fruits and vegetables.
- Choose whole fruits instead of fruit juice.
- Choose higher fibre cereals like oatmeal or shredded wheat more often.
- Add beans, lentils, and chickpeas to homemade soups and casseroles.
- Read food labels to see the fibre content and choose foods with higher amounts (at least 5% DV a serving).
- Choose whole grains more often instead of refined (white) options.
- To see if something is made with whole grains, check the label. The first ingredient in the ingredient list should have the words “whole grain” followed by the type of grain.
- Add 1 to 2 Tbsp of any of these foods to your cereal or yogurt:
  - › Wheat bran
  - › Oat bran
  - › Psyllium
  - › Chia seeds
  - › Ground flaxseed
- Add nuts and seeds to salads and cereals.
- Eat more fibre a little bit at a time, over time. This will help prevent gas, bloating, or cramping.
- Make sure you drink lots of water (try to drink 2L of water a day).

## **Fruits and Vegetables**

- Eating fruits and vegetables can lower your risk of many diseases, including heart disease and cancer.
- Fruits and vegetables give your body vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fibre that it needs for good health.
- Including fruits and/or vegetables at every meal and snack will help you get the amount you need each day.

## Tips to help you eat more fruits and vegetables

- Include more whole fruits and vegetables instead of juices.
- Choose fruits and vegetables prepared with little or no fat, sugar, or salt.
- Try to fill half your plate with vegetables at each meal.
  - › Choose lots of different coloured vegetables.
  - › Choose orange and dark green vegetables often (like carrots, broccoli, kale, and squash).
  - › Choose more vegetables than fruit throughout the day.

## Sugar

- Sugar gives our bodies energy.
- Sugar is naturally found in some foods and drinks (like lactose in milk and fructose in fruit), or added into foods and drinks (like sucrose in cookies and high fructose corn syrup in pop).
- Added sugars include:
  - › Sugar, honey, and molasses added to foods and drinks
  - › Fruit juice
- You get enough natural sugar from your food. Having too much added sugar can be harmful to your health. Eating too much added sugar is linked to:
  - › Heart disease
  - › High cholesterol
  - › Stroke
  - › Cancer
  - › Obesity
  - › Tooth cavities
- The World Health Organization (WHO) suggests limiting added sugars to 6 or less tsp a day (**1 tsp of sugar is equal to 4 grams**).

## Tips to help you eat less sugar

- Eat whole foods.
- Check food labels for added sugars (see “How to read a food label” on page 11 for more information).
- Drink **water** instead of sweetened drinks like sports drinks, energy drinks, pop, chocolate milk, and juice.

## Fat

- Our bodies need fat to help absorb (take in) vitamins, but fat is also high in calories. Choosing whole, natural foods is the best way to avoid eating too much fat.

<b>Best fat choices</b>	<b>Where is it found?</b>
<b>Unsaturated</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comes from plant-based sources and fish</li><li>• Good for your heart and blood vessels</li><li>• Liquid at room temperature</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nuts and seeds</li><li>• Avocados</li><li>• Fish</li><li>• Oils (olive, canola, avocado)</li></ul>
<b>Omega-3 fatty acids</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Type of unsaturated fat</li><li>• Essential (needed) fat that our bodies cannot make</li><li>• Linked with a lower risk of heart disease</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fatty fish (salmon, trout, mackerel, sardines, herring)</li><li>• Oils (canola, soy, flax)</li><li>• Nuts and seeds (walnuts, ground flaxseeds, chia seeds)</li><li>• Omega-3 eggs</li><li>• Legumes (soybeans and soy products)</li></ul>

Fat choices to limit or avoid	Where is it found?
<p><b>Saturated (limit)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonly found in processed and fried foods</li> <li>• Also found in animal products and some plant-based oils</li> <li>• Can raise bad (LDL or low-density lipoprotein) cholesterol</li> <li>• Solid at room temperature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Processed meats (salami, bologna, hot dogs, sausages, pepperoni)</li> <li>• Full fat dairy products (cream, butter, whole milk)</li> <li>• Oils (coconut, palm)</li> <li>• High fat meats (lard, meat with fat, poultry with skin)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Trans (avoid)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Man-made (not found naturally in foods) through a process called hydrogenation</li> <li>• Used in processed foods for longer shelf life</li> <li>• Bad for heart health</li> <li>• Solid at room temperature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shortening</li> <li>• Hard, block margarine</li> <li>• Store-bought baked goods (doughnuts, cookies, cakes, muffins, crackers)</li> <li>• Fast food</li> <li>• Any food that has the words “hydrogenated” or “partially hydrogenated” in the ingredient list</li> </ul>

# How to read a food label

## Serving size

- The amount of nutrients listed is based on the product's serving size. Compare this amount to the amount you eat.
- The serving size on the label is not always the serving size of the food it is best to eat.
- Look for the same serving sizes to compare similar foods.

## Calories

- The amount of calories in a food is based on the serving size.
- Calories are the amount of energy in food. If you eat more calories than your body uses, you will gain weight.

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
<b>Valeur nutritive</b>	
Per 1 cup (228 g) / par 1 tasse (228 g)	
Servings Per Container 2	
Portions par contenant 2	
Amount Teneur	%Daily Value %valeur quotidienne
<b>Calories / Calories 250</b>	
<b>Fat / Lipides 12 g</b>	<b>18 %</b>
Saturated / saturés 3 g	
+ Trans / trans 3 g	
<b>Cholesterol / Cholestérol 30 mg</b>	<b>10 %</b>
<b>Sodium / Sodium 470 mg</b>	<b>20 %</b>
<b>Carbohydrate / Glucides 31 g</b>	<b>10 %</b>
Fibre / Fibres 0 g	
Sugars / Sucres 5 g	
<b>Protein / Protéines 5 g</b>	
Vitamin A / Vitamine A	4 %
Vitamin C / Vitamine C	2 %
Calcium / Calcium	20 %
Iron / Fer	4 %

## % Daily Value (DV)

- The DV tells you if there is a little or a lot of a nutrient in one serving. 5% or less is considered a little, 15% or more is considered a lot.

## Fat

- Look at the total amount of fat.
- The total fat content includes unsaturated, saturated, and trans fats. Try to use and eat products with zero trans fat. Trans fat is not healthy and should be avoided.

## Sodium

- Avoid high sodium foods (15% DV or more). Look for lower sodium foods (5% DV or less).

## Fibre

- Choose foods with at least 5% DV for fibre a serving.

## Sugar

- Look for lower amounts, including natural and added sugar.
- Check the ingredient list for added sugar. Look for words that mean sugar, like:
  - › Sugar
  - › Syrups
  - › concentrate
  - › Dextrose
  - › Maltose
  - › Maltodextrin
  - › Fructose
  - › Sucrose
  - › Honey
  - › Glucose
  - › Fruit juice
  - › Molasses

Remember that **1 teaspoon of sugar** is equal to **4 grams**.

## What should I look for on the ingredient list?

- Ingredients are listed by weight. This means that foods have more of the ingredients that are the start of the list and less of the ingredients at the end of the list.
- Fat, sodium, and sugar may be in the ingredient list under different names.
- The ingredient list can also help you check for and avoid certain ingredients in food if you have an allergy or intolerance.
- To learn more about reading an ingredient list, you can visit this web page from Health Canada:
  - › [www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/understanding-food-labels/ingredient-list.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/understanding-food-labels/ingredient-list.html)

**Remember: the words “hydrogenated” and “partially hydrogenated” mean that there are trans fats in the product.**

## **More information**

These websites have information on many different aspects of food and nutrition.

### **Cookspiration®**

- Recipe ideas
  - › [www.cookspiration.com](http://www.cookspiration.com)

### **Diabetes Canada**

- Information about diabetes, resources, webinars, and recipes
  - › [www.diabetes.ca](http://www.diabetes.ca)

### **Dietitians of Canada**

- Information about nutrition, how to find a dietitian, and recipes
  - › [www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca)

### **UnlockFood.ca™**

- Information about nutrition and how to find a dietitian
  - › [www.unlockfood.ca](http://www.unlockfood.ca)

### **Health Canada**

- Information about nutrition
  - › [www.canada.ca/en/health-canada.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada.html)

### **Government of Alberta – Healthy Living Resources**

- Recipes and information about nutrition and health
  - › [www.alberta.ca/healthy-living-resources.aspx](http://www.alberta.ca/healthy-living-resources.aspx)

## **Healthy Families BC (British Columbia)**

- Information about nutrition
  - › [www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating-physical-activity/food-and-nutrition](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating-physical-activity/food-and-nutrition)

## **Heart and Stroke Foundation**

- Information about heart disease and heart healthy recipes
  - › [www.heartandstroke.com](http://www.heartandstroke.com)

## **Nova Scotia Health Nutrition Education and Counselling (Dietitians)**

- Local nutrition education programs offered by Nova Scotia Health
- If you would like to talk with a dietitian, ask your primary health care provider for more information.

What are your questions?  
Please ask. We are here to help you.





# Notes:

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### Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <https://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation>  
Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>  
Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

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The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.  
If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.

