

Patient & Family Guide  
2019

# 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)

# Heart Healthy Eating Guide

## What is heart healthy eating?

Heart healthy eating includes an overall balance of whole, nutritious foods. These are foods that have not been highly processed or refined. This includes a variety of vegetables and fruit, whole grains, lean proteins, and plant-based proteins. What you eat has a big effect on both your heart and your overall health.

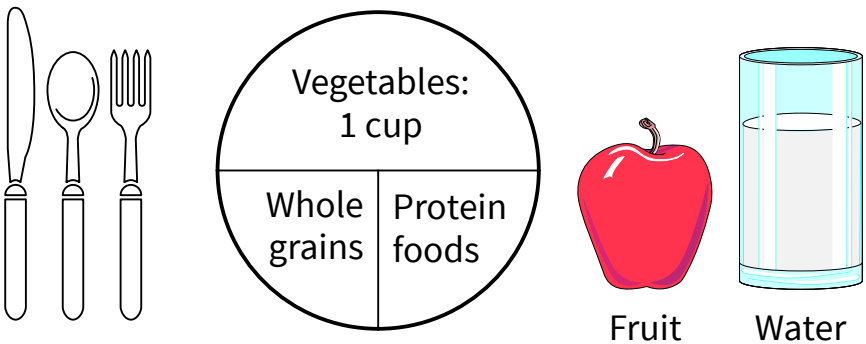
Healthy eating can help lower your risk of heart disease by:

- › 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?

- Prepare meals at home using fresh, whole foods.
  - › Eat fewer processed foods. Nutrients we need for good health can be lost through processing. Choose whole foods to get the most nutrition and least additives. 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. Limit distractions when you are eating (e.g., put your phone down, turn off the TV).
- › If you are used to skipping meals, you may need to start eating regular meals to reset your hunger cues.
- Fill half your plate with vegetables.
  - › Eating more vegetables lowers blood pressure and helps keep portions small.
- Choose foods higher in fibre.
- Balance your meals to keep you satisfied longer.
  - › Make sure that 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 to add flavour when cooking.
  - › Enjoy vegetables and fruit without added salt or sugar. Drain and rinse canned vegetables and fruit.

- › Use smaller amounts of condiments (e.g., ketchup, mustard, soy sauce, mayonnaise, butter, margarine). Learn to enjoy the taste of whole foods.
- Choose proteins from plants more often.
  - › Plant-based proteins (e.g., nuts, seeds, peas, lentils, beans, soy products) have more fibre and less saturated fat than animal-based proteins.
- Choose fatty fish 2 times each week.
  - › Fatty fish (e.g., salmon, mackerel, sardines, trout) are sources of omega-3 fatty acids.
- Drink water when you are thirsty.
  - › Avoid drinks with added sugars (e.g., pop, juice, sports drinks, chocolate milk, energy drinks).
- Ask your family health care provider about alcohol and marijuana use.
  - › Alcohol can increase blood pressure, weight, and triglycerides (a type of fat in your blood). For more info, see Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines: [www.ccsa.ca/canadas-low-risk-alcohol-drinking-guidelines-brochure](http://www.ccsa.ca/canadas-low-risk-alcohol-drinking-guidelines-brochure)
- Ask your family 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.

- To follow the Mediterranean diet:
  - › Focus on vegetables and fruit, making them the main part of your diet.
  - › Eat beans, legumes, nuts, and whole grains every day.
  - › Cook with olive or avocado oil instead of butter.
  - › Focus on lean proteins. 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 info on the Mediterranean diet or visit: <https://oldwayspt.org/traditional-diets/mediterranean-diet>

### **Other things that can affect your food choices include:**

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

- Stress
  - › Stress triggers hormones that cause hunger and can lead to mindless or emotional eating (using food as a comfort). Stress has many other negative effects on health. Stress cannot always be lowered or avoided, but you can learn to manage it.

### **These resources may help with managing 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)
  - › See info on stress management.
- HelpGuide
  - › [www.helpguide.org/home-pages/stress.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/home-pages/stress.htm)
  - › Useful management strategies for dealing with emotional stress.
- ISMA<sup>UK</sup> (International Stress Management Association of the United Kingdom)
  - › [www.isma.org.uk](http://www.isma.org.uk)

## **Sodium (salt)**

Salt is the main source of sodium in our food. Eating too much sodium can increase 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 = 2300 mg of sodium).

\*Note: Sea salt, kosher salt, and pink Himalayan salt all have the same amount of sodium as table salt.

### **Tips to help limit your salt intake:**

- 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.
- Take the salt shaker off the table.
- Check food labels for sodium (see page 13 for more info on how to read a food label).
  - › Choose “no salt added” canned products over products labelled “low sodium” and “reduced sodium”. Both “low sodium” and “reduced sodium” could still be too high so it’s 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 and insoluble. It is important to eat a variety of plant-based foods to include both types of fibre.

### **Soluble fibre**

Soluble fibre directly lowers cholesterol levels. It also helps with blood sugar control and managing diarrhea (loose bowel movements).

- Sources of soluble fibre:
  - › pulses (e.g., beans, lentils, and chickpeas)
  - › oats
  - › psyllium
  - › ground flaxseed and chia seeds
  - › some fruits (e.g., berries, applesauce)

### **Insoluble fibre**

Insoluble fibre helps you feel full and satisfied and keeps bowel movements regular. It is sometimes 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 vegetables and fruit – avoid drinking 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 for fibre content and aim for higher amounts (at least 5% DV per serving).
- Choose whole grains more often instead of refined (white) options. The first ingredient in the ingredient list should have the words “whole grain” followed by the type of grain.
- Add 1-2 tablespoons of wheat bran, oat bran, psyllium, chia seeds, or ground flaxseed to your cereal or yogurt.
- Add nuts and seeds to salads and cereals.

Note: Add more fibre bit by bit over time to avoid gas, bloating, or cramping and make sure you drink lots of water (try for about 2 litres per day).

## **Vegetables and fruit**

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

### **Tips to help you eat more vegetables and fruit:**

- Include more whole vegetables and fruit instead of juices.
- Choose vegetables and fruit prepared with little or no fat, sugar, or salt.
- Aim to fill half your plate with vegetables at each meal.
- Choose a variety of colours.
  - › Choose orange and dark green vegetables often (e.g., carrots, broccoli, kale, and squash).
- Choose more vegetables than fruit throughout the day.

## **Sugar**

Sugar gives our bodies energy. It 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).

We get enough sugar naturally in foods and we do not need added sugar. Added sugars include sugar, honey, and molasses added to foods and drinks. Juice also counts as an added sugar.

Eating a lot of added sugar is linked to heart disease, stroke, obesity, high cholesterol, cancer, and cavities in your teeth.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends limiting added sugars to 6 or less teaspoons per day (1 teaspoon of sugar = 4 grams).

**Tips to help you eat less sugar:**

- Eat whole, natural foods.
- Read food labels to single out and avoid foods with added sugars (see “How to read a food label” section of this pamphlet on page 13 for more info).
- Drink water instead of sweetened drinks such as sports drinks, energy drinks, pop, chocolate milk, and juice.

# Fat

Our bodies need fat to help absorb 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>
<p><b>Unsaturated</b></p> <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>
<p><b>Omega-3 fatty acids</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Type of unsaturated fat</li><li>• Essential (our bodies need it) 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>• Known to raise bad (LDL) 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 visible fat, poultry with skin)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Trans (avoid)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Man-made 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 this amount. Compare this amount to the amount you actually eat. Look for the same serving sizes to compare similar foods.

Note: The serving size is not necessarily the amount of food you should eat.

## Calories

- The calories are 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.

## % Daily Value (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.

<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	
<b>Amount</b>	<b>%Daily Value</b>
<b>Teneur</b>	<b>%valeur quotidienne</b>
<b>Calories / Calories</b> 250	
<b>Fat / Lipides</b> 12 g	<b>18 %</b>
Saturated / saturés 3 g	
+ Trans / trans 3 g	<b>30 %</b>
<b>Cholesterol / Cholestérol</b> 30 mg	<b>10 %</b>
<b>Sodium / Sodium</b> 470 mg	<b>20 %</b>
<b>Carbohydrate / Glucides</b> 31 g	<b>10 %</b>
Fibre / Fibres 0 g	<b>0 %</b>
Sugars / Sucres 5 g	
<b>Protein / Protéines</b> 5 g	
Vitamin A / Vitamine A	4 %
Vitamin C / Vitamine C	2 %
Calcium / Calcium	20 %
Iron / Fer	4 %

## Fat

- Look at the total amount of fat. Total fat content includes unsaturated, saturated, and trans fats. Aim for zero trans fat, as it is unhealthy and should be avoided.

## Sodium

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

## Fibre

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

## Sugar

- Aim for lower amounts, including natural and added sugar. Read the ingredient list for words that mean sugar. Examples of added sugar ingredients to avoid include: sugar, dextrose, fructose, glucose, syrups, maltose, sucrose, fruit juice concentrate, maltodextrin, honey, and molasses.
- Remember: 4 g = 1 teaspoon of sugar.

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

Ingredients are listed by weight. This means that foods have more of the ingredients found at the beginning of the list and less of the ingredients towards the end of the list.

Fat, sodium, and sugar may appear in the ingredient list under different names. Visit: [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) for more info.

The ingredient list can help you check if a food has a certain ingredient, and avoid ingredients if you have an allergy or intolerance.

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



## For more information, visit these websites:

- Cookspiration® – recipe ideas
  - › [www.cookspiration.com](http://www.cookspiration.com)
- Diabetes Canada – info on diabetes, resources, webinars, and recipes
  - › [www.diabetes.ca](http://www.diabetes.ca)
- Dietitians of Canada – general nutrition info, how to find a dietitian, and recipes
  - › [www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca)
- Health Canada – general nutrition info
  - › [www.canada.ca/en/health-canada.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada.html)
- Government of Alberta – healthy living resources and recipes
  - › [www.alberta.ca/healthy-living-resources.aspx](http://www.alberta.ca/healthy-living-resources.aspx)
- Healthy Families BC (British Columbia) – general nutrition info
  - › [www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/eating](http://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/eating)
- Heart and Stroke Foundation – heart disease info and recipes
  - › [www.heartandstroke.com](http://www.heartandstroke.com)
- NSHA Nutrition Education and Counselling (Dietitians) – Click on ‘Location & contact information’ to contact a dietitian with your nutrition questions
  - › [www.nshealth.ca/content/nutrition-education-and-counselling-dietitians](http://www.nshealth.ca/content/nutrition-education-and-counselling-dietitians)
- UnlockFood.ca™ – general nutrition info
  - › [www.unlockfood.ca](http://www.unlockfood.ca)



### **Looking for more health information?**

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientGuides>

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>

*Nova Scotia Health Authority promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.*

*Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!*

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

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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.