

Be a Heart Hero

Are you at risk?

Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of men and women, and is more deadly than all forms of cancer combined. But it's estimated that about 80 percent of cardiac events could be prevented if people made the right choices for their hearts. Remember, taking good care of your heart doesn't mean you have to make big changes in your life. Every time you eat better, exercise more or do something to reduce stress, you're taking a small step to be a hero to your heart.



Get started

You can do it. You can become a heart hero. You don't have to go big. Just do one thing. Eat more veggies, try a little exercise, and laugh more. Do it for yourself and for everyone you love. Do it now.

Get moving

Being a heart hero means that you're playing an active role in caring for your heart. You don't have to start training for a marathon. Just get out of the house with a friend and have some fun. Sometimes we forget that the best exercise is rediscovering hopscotch or skipping stones or flying a kite. Explore more ways to move.

Reduce stress

When you're feeling stressed, it's time to take a break. Go for it. Escape to the golf course with a friend. Get back to nature. Or lighten up with a funny video. Reducing stress is good for your heart and may even help prevent heart disease.

Eat better

Cook from your heart for yourself and for those you love. Try a new vegetable at dinner. Add an apple to your day. Snack on a carrot. Spice things up with fresh herbs. Try new recipes with family and friends. Eat a little better each day and discover how much better you may feel.

Mediterranean Basics

A salad drizzled with olive oil and lemon juice, fat-free yogurt laced with walnuts and fresh fruit, whole-grain toast topped with avocado and sliced tomato. Sound delicious? These are all foods you would find in the Mediterranean diet. Far from exotic, eating the "Mediterranean way" is less of a diet and more about a healthy approach to eating. It is based on foods that are traditionally found in countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. Vegetables, fruits, nuts, fish and olive oil are abundant. Meat, saturated fats and high-fat dairy are consumed in much smaller amounts.

Health benefits

Multiple studies suggest that eating a Mediterranean-style diet may help contribute to a longer life, aid in weight control and cut the risk of heart disease. Researchers credit health benefits to plenty of plant based foods, fish and healthy fats, combined with lower amounts of high-fat animal foods.

Mediterranean diet 101

You don't have to come from the Mediterranean to appreciate this wholesome meal plan. Here are the basics:

- **Base your diet around plant-based foods, such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts and seeds.** These provide hearty doses of antioxidants, loads of fiber and other vitamins and minerals that can help ward off disease.
- **Increase healthy fats, especially olive or canola oil, nuts, avocados and fatty fish (such as salmon and sardines).** These are all high in heart-healthy monounsaturated fat.
- **Decrease saturated fats and trans fats.** Read food labels to make healthier choices.

- **Eat moderate amounts of fish and poultry, and less red meat.** Choose dairy products that are low-fat or fat-free. **Use spices and herbs** to flavor foods rather than salt.
- **Drink low or moderate amounts of red wine with meals** – no more than two glasses per day for men and one glass per day for women. But if you don't drink, don't start.
- **Choose fresh fruit for desserts.** And remember that just because fats such as olive oil and nuts are healthy, it does not give you license to eat them with abandon. These foods are still high in total calories.

In the kitchen

Switching to a Mediterranean way of eating is not only delicious, it's easy, too. Here are some suggestions to help you make the switch:

If you now eat:	Try this instead:
White toast with butter and jam	Oatmeal with walnuts and fruit
Turkey on roll with mayo	Turkey and hummus on whole wheat pita
Large bowl of pasta with meat	Small amount of pasta and meat mixed with lots of vegetables
Salad with full-fat dressing	Salad with olive oil and lemon juice
Pretzels or chips	Nuts and/or fruit
Burger and fries	Salmon and brown rice pilaf

Finally, don't forget the importance of daily physical activity. Check with your doctor on what's best for you.

Heart Healthy Supplements

Some foods and dietary supplements may help lower blood pressure or blood cholesterol levels. Be sure to check with your doctor to find out what diet changes and supplements are right for you.



Potassium

Evidence strongly indicates that a potassium-rich diet can help achieve healthy blood pressure levels, and that potassium supplements can lower systolic blood pressure. The best sources of potassium are the fruits and vegetables that contain them. Some potassium-rich foods include bananas, oranges, pears, prunes, cantaloupes, tomatoes, dried peas and beans, nuts, potatoes, and avocados.

Plant stanols/sterols

Plant sterols and stanols are substances that occur naturally in small amounts in many plant foods. Two grams taken every day have been shown to lower LDL cholesterol by up to 15 percent. You can now get stanols or sterols in some margarine spreads, orange juice, cereals and even granola bars. They can also be found in gel form as a supplement. Ask your doctor if taking plant stanols/sterols is right for you.

Fiber

Fiber supplementation can help reduce blood pressure levels. It may take up to 8 weeks to achieve the maximum benefit.

Folate

Increasing folate (a B vitamin) intake to more than 800 mcg/day may help reduce blood pressure. Dietary sources of folate include citrus fruits, leafy green vegetables, beans, and grain products. Folate helps reduce homocysteine levels.

Fish Oil and Omega 3 Fatty Acids

Omega 3 fatty acids are found in oily fish. Studies indicate that they may have specific benefits for many medical conditions, including hypertension. They appear to help keep blood vessels flexible and may help protect the nervous system. Fatty acids are also available in supplements, but their long-term effects on blood pressure are unknown.

Calcium

Calcium regulates the tone of the smooth muscles lining blood vessels. Studies have found that people who have sufficient dietary calcium have lower blood pressure than those who do not. Hypertension itself increases calcium loss from the body. The effects of extra calcium on blood pressure, however, are mixed, with some even showing higher pressure.

Antioxidant Supplements

Antioxidants are substances that help the body eliminate oxidants (also called oxygen-free radicals), which are damaging particles produced as part of the body's chemical processes. Some antioxidant supplements, including vitamins C and E and alpha-lipoic acid, are being studied for possible benefits in protecting against hypertension by preventing injury in the blood vessels. Vitamin C may have specific benefits for hypertension by preventing dangerous effects on nitric acid, the substance that keeps arteries flexible.

Recipe: Mixed Berry Parfaits

Yield: 5 servings **Active Time:** 15 minutes **Total Time:** 4 hours

Ingredients:

- 1 box (3 oz.) wild strawberry gelatin
- 1 cup each strawberries, blueberries and raspberries
- 2 cups prepared vanilla pudding

Preparation:

Planning Tip: *Steps 1-4 can be done up to 2 days ahead.*

1. You'll need five 10-oz glasses.
2. Prepare gelatin as box directs. Refrigerate, occasionally stirring gently (try not to create bubbles), 30 minutes or until the gelatin is the consistency of egg whites.
3. Meanwhile, stem and hull 1/2 cup of strawberries; cut into small pieces. Combine with 1/2 cup each blueberries and raspberries. Divide fruit mixture among glasses.
4. Add gelatin and gently stir with a skewer to incorporate berries so some are suspended in the gelatin (don't overstir). Refrigerate for 3 hours or until set.
5. Spoon pudding on top of gelatin. Stem, hull and slice remaining strawberries and mix in a bowl with remaining blueberries and raspberries; spoon over pudding.

Nutrition Facts:

Amount Per Serving:
Calories: 207Total
Fat: 3g
Saturated Fat: 1g
Cholesterol: 0
Sodium: 222mg
Total Carbohydrates: 44g
Dietary Fiber: 3g
Protein: 3g

Recipe Source: The Food Editors at Woman's Day



