

## Health Tip: Heart Healthy Foods

There are several risk factors for heart disease; one of the *major controllable risk factors is diet*. You can help to avoid clogged arteries, heart attacks and strokes by reducing foods high in saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium from your diet. Each day, aim for less than 30% of your calories from fat (no more than 8 to 10% from saturated fat), less than 300 mg of cholesterol, and, less than 2,400 mg of sodium.

You can also enjoy a wide variety of heart-healthy foods to reduce your risk for heart disease. From spinach to blueberries, heart-healthy foods deliver a powerful dose of phytonutrients that prevent and repair damage to cells essential to protecting your heart.

### Take care of your heart and enjoy these foods:

- **Oats** are nourishing whole grains and a great source of omega-3 fatty acids, folate, and potassium as well as cholesterol-lowering fiber. Top hot oatmeal with fresh berries.
- **Brown rice** is another heart-healthy grain that contains B-complex vitamins and fiber. B-complex vitamins, like vitamin B-12 (folate) and vitamin B-6, protect against blood clots and atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries. Like oatmeal, brown rice contains Niacin (vitamin B-3) which helps to increase HDL "good" cholesterol.
- **Ground flaxseed**, containing omega-3 fatty acids, fiber, and phytoestrogens, is a whole grain that hides easily in all sorts of foods. Add a teaspoon to yogurt parfaits or morning cereal.
- **Nuts, such as almonds and walnuts**, are an excellent source of healthy fat and nutrients, including fiber and phytosterols. In your next salad, add walnuts for a delicious crunch. You can also add nuts to pastas and pancakes, or you might find it fun to make your own trail mix.
- **Blueberries** top the list as one of the most powerful disease-fighting fruits because of their potent antioxidants. These delicious berries are also packed with fiber and vitamin C, and are available all year long. Other heart-healthy fruits include cranberries, strawberries, raspberries, papaya and cantaloupe.
- Add a **bit of avocado** to a salad to up the amount of heart-healthy fats. Avocados can help lower LDL "bad" cholesterol and they allow for the absorption of other carotenoids.
- **Spinach** is a powerhouse. Its rich, dark color comes from the multiple phytochemicals, vitamins, and minerals (especially folate and iron) that help to fight disease, protect against heart disease, and preserve your eyesight. Broccoli, red bell peppers, asparagus, and sweet potatoes are also heart-healthy vegetables packed with vitamins A, E and fiber.
- Use **olive oil** instead of butter when cooking. Full of monounsaturated fats, olive oil lowers LDL cholesterol. Look for an extra-virgin variety as it is the least processed.
- Give soup or salad a heart-healthy nutrient boost with **black or kidney beans**, which contain B-complex vitamins, niacin, folate, magnesium, omega-3 fatty acids, calcium and fiber.
- **Salmon** and other omega-3 rich foods, eaten twice a week, may reduce your risk of a heart attack. Omega-3 fatty acids help boost the immune system, reduce blood pressure and keep blood clots at bay. Consider choosing wild salmon over farm-raised fish to reduce exposure to insecticides, pesticides, and heavy metals.

You can start incorporating the above foods today. And, yes, you can even include chocolate in your heart-healthy diet! Make sure that you choose **dark chocolate** with 70% or higher cocoa content to get the potential blood pressure lowering benefits.

Make an appointment for a heart health screening with your doctor or take advantage of screenings at your workplace or in the community. Knowing your heart health numbers can help you to create a customized plan for lowering your risk.

Sources: American Dietetic Association, Mayo Clinic, Cleveland Clinic, and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. The Health Tip of the Week is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Please feel free to copy and distribute this health resource.