



Eat for a healthy heart

My family has a history of heart disease. What should I focus on to make my diet as heart-healthy as possible?

Whether or not you have a family history of heart disease, it's a good idea to follow a heart-healthy diet. Heart disease is the nation's No. 1 killer.

Recently the Food and Drug Administration posted an article on its Consumer Updates page (<http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/>) about using the Nutrition Facts label to choose heart-healthy foods. The article was written in honor of American Heart Month in February. Here is some of the FDA's guidance:

- Choose foods with less fat, particularly saturated fat and trans fat, and less cholesterol.
- Choose foods with less sodium, which can increase blood pressure — a serious risk factor associated with heart disease.
- Choose foods with fewer calories and more fiber, especially fiber from fruits, vegetables and whole grains.

When using the Nutrition Facts label, many nutrients have an accompanying percentage of the nutrient's "Daily Value." The general rule is that a Daily Value of 20 percent or more indicates the food is high in that nutrient; a Daily Value of 5 percent or less indicates the food is low in the nutrient. There is no Daily Value for trans fats, so just take a look at the total amount of trans fat on the label

— the idea is just to keep those as low as possible in your diet.

You can also look on food labels for official health claims related to heart health. These claims have passed muster with the FDA because they have met with significant scientific agreement about the relationship of the nutrients mentioned and a reduced risk of disease. Official heart-healthy claims include:

- "While many factors affect heart disease, diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of this disease."
- "Diets low in sodium may reduce the risk of high blood pressure, a disease associated with many factors."
- "Soluble fiber from foods such as [name of food], as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may reduce the risk of heart disease."

Additional guidelines for choosing and preparing foods aimed at a healthy heart include:

- Choose lean meat and poultry, and cook using a low-fat method (grill, broil or bake).
- Avoid foods high in added sugar.
- Unless a health professional has instructed you to restrict the amount of potassium you eat, choose foods that are high in potassium, which acts as a counter-balance to sodium and can help regulate blood pressure.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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