

Heart Healthy Diet Tips:

Maximize the fruits and vegetables in your diet. Include fruits and vegetables with every meal.

Minimize intake of “empty calories”...foods high in sugar and fat with little to no nutritional benefit.

Not all fats are bad. Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats are preferred over saturated and trans fats. Saturated and trans fats are proven to increase bad cholesterol levels and lead to “hardening of the arteries. Replacing these with mono and polyunsaturated fats has proven to decrease bad cholesterol levels. Omega-3 fatty acids have been shown to be very beneficial in decreasing health problems related to coronary artery disease. In fact the American Heart Association recommends taking in at least 1 gram of these fatty acids per day if you have coronary heart disease.

Not all carbohydrates are bad. Some carbohydrates such as simple sugars are absorbed quickly and make blood sugar levels rise rapidly. This leads to elevated insulin levels, which among other things tells your body to store this energy as fat. Complex carbohydrates are absorbed more slowly. Carbohydrates are important components of our diet, most dietary experts recommend at least 50% of all calories coming from carbohydrates. People with diabetes, pre-diabetes and obesity can benefit from limiting simple sugars which cause elevations in blood sugar and insulin levels. This is one of the principles behind popular diets such as the Atkins, Zone and American Diabetes Association diets.

Snacks: Substitute fruits, vegetables and nuts & whole grain products for foods high in sugar and fat.

Eat a variety of grain products, including whole grains. Choose 6 or more servings per day.

When eating meat, choose lean beef and poultry, not to exceed 6 ounces per day. Trim all obvious fat off meat before cooking.

Eat fish >3x / week, especially fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids such as salmon, tuna, sardines, herring, lake trout and mackerel.

Steam, boil, broil or bake. Avoid deep fried foods as much as possible.

Limit egg yolks to 3/ week. Substitute w/ “egg beaters” or other egg substitutes.

Limit foods high in saturated fat, trans fat and/or cholesterol, such as full-fat milk products, fatty meats, tropical oils, partially hydrogenated vegetable oils and egg yolks.

Use skim milk products including ice milk and fat-free yogurt.

Use cholesterol free oils, especially those such as canola and olive oil, which have proven health benefits.

Instead of stick butter (high saturated fat) and stick margarines (often high in trans fats), choose liquid and tub margarines that have at least twice as much polyunsaturated fat as saturated fat.

Many products advertised as low in fat have increased sugar. Sugars are a main source of “empty calories”- foods with no nutritional benefit. The perfect example is soda. Minimize soda (pop) intake, drink diet soda if you must drink soda. Also minimize intake of other sugars such as candy, concentrated fruit drinks and most desserts.

Eat less than 4-6 grams of salt (sodium chloride) per day (2,400 milligrams of sodium).

Keep cold water in your fridge and try to drink water when thirsty instead of high calorie drinks like soda and juice. 8 glasses of water per day has been advocated.

Be careful not to use food as a reward or comfort. Motivate yourself with other rewards such as a new outfit if you attain your goal weight loss.

Limit eating out when possible, especially fast foods, deep fried foods and foods high in sugar and fat.

When eating out choose heart healthy foods such as lean meats, fish, salads, yogurts, fruits and vegetables.

There are many delicious, healthy recipes that can be found in a variety of sources including the American Heart Association web-site.

Popular Diets

There are over 1000 diet books now available. Many of the highly publicized diets of today differ substantially with previous traditional mainstream medical advice. There has been some concern about the safety and effectiveness of such diets. There are not a lot of quality medical studies comparing the diets. There are some studies which allow reasonable conclusions to be drawn. The following are examples of diets which are currently popular:

Atkins Diet: This diet is based on limiting carbohydrate intake without fat restriction. This diet has been shown to be effective for losing weight. A criticism has been that the diet is difficult to maintain long term and many people gain weight back when they stop. There is also concern about how it affects coronary heart disease because of the high intake of saturated fat and cholesterol.

Ornish Diet: This diet is based on severely restricting fat intake and consequently increases carbohydrate intake. Concerns with this diet have been that with increased carbohydrate intake blood sugar and triglyceride levels could rise.

Zone Diet: This diet is based on maintaining balanced intake of carbohydrates, protein and fat in a 40:30:30 ratio. It also stresses limiting glycemic load (minimizing quickly absorbed carbohydrates) to limit the response of increased blood sugar and insulin levels that drive fat storage. It also stresses limiting calories from any one meal to 500 and any one snack 100.

Weight Watchers: This diet encourages a traditional balanced diet with stress on limiting portion sizes and calories by using a point system.

A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in January of 2005 compared 4 popular diets. This study showed that in general people had difficulty complying with all 4 diets, especially the Atkins and Ornish diets. All four diets were effective in producing weight loss when people were compliant. On average people lost about 10 lbs in 2 months in all groups. The people that lost weight had improvements in CHD risk factors including cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar and C-reactive protein (a measure of inflammation that has been correlated with the development of CHD). The Atkins diet group had little change in bad cholesterol, while the other groups had a significant improvement. However the ratio of good to bad cholesterol was not significantly different in the groups. Blood sugar, insulin and triglyceride levels didn't change significantly in the Ornish diet group, but did decrease significantly in the Atkins and Zone groups.

Conclusions that can be made about popular diets include the following:

- There is no perfect diet that works for everyone.
- Finding a diet that you can adhere to over the long term is more important than what type of diet it is.
- If you can lose weight...you will likely decrease your CHD risk factors.
- No matter what diet you use...limiting total calorie intake and increasing calories burned by increasing physical activity and exercise is important.

- Would recommend trying to follow the recommendations of the heart healthy diet as provided. If you are not able to lose weight following these recommendations, you may need a more structured diet program, such as one of those discussed above.