

# *Eat for a Healthy Heart*

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Making healthy food choices is one important thing you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease, the leading cause of death of men and women in the United States.

According to the American Heart Association, about 80 million adults in the U.S. have at least one form of heart disease, disorders that prevent the heart from functioning normally, including coronary artery disease, heart rhythm problems, heart defects, infections, and cardiomyopathy (thickening or enlargement of the heart muscle).

Experts say you can reduce the risk of developing these problems with lifestyle changes that include eating a healthy diet. But with racks full of books and magazines about food and recipes, what is the best diet for a healthy heart?

Follow these simple guidelines when preparing meals:

- Balance calories to manage body weight
- Eat at least 4.5 cups of fruits and vegetables a day, including a variety of dark-green, red, and orange vegetables, beans, and peas.
- Eat seafood (including oily fish) in place of some meat and poultry
- Eat whole grains; the equivalent of at least three 1-ounce servings a day
- Use oils to replace solid fats.
- Use fat-free or low-fat versions of dairy products.

The government's newly released "Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010" also says Americans should reduce their sodium intake. The general recommendation is to eat less than 2,300 mg. of sodium a day. But Americans 51 or older, African-Americans of any age, and people with high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease should restrict their intake to 1,500 mg. The government estimates that about half the U.S. population is in one of those three categories.

## **Packaged and Restaurant Food**

To assist with your efforts of adhering to healthy guidelines, using the nutrition labels on the packaged foods you buy is recommended.

Product labels give you the power to compare foods quickly and easily so you can judge which products best fit into a heart healthy diet or meet other dietary needs. When reading a percent DV (daily value of key nutrients) on the label, 5 percent or less is low and 20 percent or more is high.

Follow these guidelines when using processed foods or eating in restaurants:

- Choose lean meats and poultry. Bake it, broil it, or grill it.
- In a restaurant, opt for steamed, grilled, or broiled dishes instead of those that are fried or sautéed.

- Look on product labels for foods low in saturated fats, trans fats, and cholesterol. Most of the fats you eat should come from polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats, such as those found in some types of fish, nuts, and vegetable oils.
- Check product labels for foods high in potassium (unless you've been advised to restrict the amount of potassium you eat). Potassium counteracts some of the effects of salt on blood pressure.
- Choose foods and beverages low in added sugars. Read the ingredient list to make sure that added sugars are not among the first ingredients. Ingredients in the largest amounts are listed first. Some names for added sugars include sucrose, glucose, high fructose corn syrup, corn syrup, maple syrup, and fructose. The nutrition facts on the product label give the total sugar content.
- Pick foods that provide dietary fiber, like fruits, beans, vegetables, and whole grains.

*Source: [FDA Consumer Health Information / U.S. Food and Drug Administration \(2/11\)](#)*

Contact [Sullivan Benefits](#) for assistance on how to educate your employees about the importance of healthy heart nutrition.

Congratulations, just taking the time to read this article is a positive step toward introducing wellness and the benefits available from a healthier lifestyle. Thank you for your time and THINK WELLNESS!