

Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Simple steps to eating a heart-healthy diet

I've seen a lot of Valentine's Day promotions focusing on heart health. What are some easy ways I can make sure my diet is heart-healthy?

Your body will give you a heartfelt thank you for following a healthful, balanced diet with three heart-healthy components:

- **Limited saturated and trans fats.** Eating too much of these types of fats increases your risk of high blood cholesterol, particularly the "bad" LDL kind. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends limiting saturated fat to 10 percent of total calories (for example, 180 calories from saturated fat, or 20 grams a day, on an 1,800-calorie-a-day diet). For trans fats, the guidelines recommend keeping them as low as you possibly can. Look at Nutrition Facts labels for saturated and trans fat content. And reduce consumption of butter and other fats that are solid at room temperature, as well as animal fat from meat, cheese and dairy products.
- **Reduced sodium.** Too much sodium causes the body to retain excess fluid, resulting, for many people, in high blood pressure. High blood pressure increases the risk of stroke, heart disease and kidney disease. Limiting processed foods can help you significantly reduce sodium in the diet. Most Americans average about 3,400 milligrams of sodium a day. The recommended limit is 2,300 milligrams, or 1,500 milligrams if you already have high blood pressure.
- **Lots of fiber.** People who eat more fiber tend to have a lower risk of heart disease. Increase fiber intake by eating more beans and other legumes, eating plenty of fruits and vegetables, and choosing whole grains instead of refined. The average American's diet supplies only



photo: Hemera

about 10-15 grams of fiber a day, while the recommendation is to eat 20-35 grams.

Need some help putting these recommendations into practice? Here are some quick tips:

- **Choose vegetables and fruit first.** They're naturally low in fat and sodium and tend to be high in fiber. Include a serving of whole fruit (not juice) at breakfast and lunch. Fill half your dinner plate with vegetables. Eat salad every day.
- **Choose lean meats and fat-free or low-fat dairy products.** If you're a cheese lover, try 2-percent-fat varieties. Watch out for processed meats, such as ham and lunchmeat — they tend to be sky-high in sodium.
- **Opt for high-fiber breakfast cereal.** Look at Nutrition Facts labels and choose cereals with 5 grams of fiber or more per serving.
- **Lay off the pizza.** Pizza alone is responsible for nearly 10 percent of the saturated fat and 6 percent of the sodium in the American diet. Make it an occasional treat rather than a staple.

If you're thinking of adopting a whole new diet, the DASH Eating Plan, based on the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute recommendations, is worth a try. Learn more about it online at nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/dash.

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