

How Do I Follow a Healthy Diet Pattern?

The American Heart Association recommends a healthy eating pattern that emphasizes vegetables, fruits and whole grains. It includes plant-based proteins (such as beans, peas and lentils), fish, skinless poultry, nontropical vegetable oils, and nuts and seeds. Limit your intake of sodium, sweets, sugar-sweetened beverages, red meat and processed meats.

Everything you eat and drink is part of your diet pattern. Make healthy choices today and they'll add up to healthier tomorrows for you!



Vegetables

- Eat a variety of colors and types, especially deeply colored vegetables, such as dark, leafy greens, carrots and broccoli.
- All vegetables count, including fresh, frozen, canned or dried. Look for vegetables canned in water with low or no added salt or sugar. For frozen vegetables, choose those without high-calorie sauces or added sodium or sugars.
- Examples of a portion per serving: 2 cups raw leafy greens; 1 cup cut-up raw (about the size of your fist) or ½ cup cooked vegetables; or 1 cup 100% vegetable juice (no salt added).

Fruits

- Unsweetened fruits are best. Eat a variety of colors and types, especially deeply colored fruits, such as peaches and berries.
- Eat whole fruits to get all the nutrients (such as dietary fiber) that can be missing in some juices.
- Examples of a portion per serving: 1 medium fruit (about the size of a baseball); ¼ cup unsweetened dried fruit; 1 cup fresh, frozen or canned fruit (unsweetened frozen or canned in its own juice or water without added sugar); or ½ cup 100% fruit juice.
- For beverages, look for 100% fruit juice. Avoid sugar-sweetened beverages. They're high in calories and low in nutrients.

Whole grains

- Choose food made mostly with whole grains. Select items such as whole-wheat bread, whole-grain crackers and brown rice. Look at the ingredients list to see that the first ingredient is a whole grain.
- Examples of a portion per serving: 1 slice bread; ½ cup hot cereal; 1 cup cereal flakes; or ½ cup cooked rice or pasta (about the size of a baseball).

Protein foods

- Mix up your protein sources, choosing mostly protein from plants, such as edamame, tofu, beans, lentils, chickpeas and split peas.
- Eat at least two servings of non-fried fish (particularly fatty fish) each week. Fatty fish, such as salmon, mackerel, herring, lake trout, sardines and albacore tuna, are high in omega-3 fatty acids.
- Remove skin from poultry before eating.
- Trim all visible fat from meats before cooking.
- Limit processed meats, such as bacon, salami, ham, hot dogs and sausage.
- Examples of a portion per serving: 2 egg whites; ¾ cup cooked, flaked fish; or half a chicken breast. A 3-ounce portion is about the size of a deck of playing cards.

(continued)



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Nuts, seeds and legumes

- Add many different types of beans (such as black, kidney, pinto, cannellini and navy) to your soups, salads and pasta dishes.
- Try sprinkling unsalted, dry-roasted nuts over your salads. Use nuts in stir-fries. Stir them into yogurt.
- Examples of a portion per serving: ½ ounce unsalted nuts; ½ ounce unsalted seeds; ½ cup cooked legumes (beans, peas, chickpeas or lentils); or 1 tablespoon low-sodium or no-salt-added peanut butter.

Low-fat or fat-free dairy products

- Choose low-fat and fat-free milk.
- Choose low-fat or fat-free yogurt with no or reduced added sugars.
- Choose low-fat or fat-free cottage cheese. Look for the lowest sodium product you can find.
- Products sold as “milks” but made from plants, such as almond and oat milk, are not dairy products. For plant-based milk alternatives, choose products low in sugar that have been fortified with calcium and vitamins A and D.
- Examples of a portion per serving: 1 cup low-fat or fat-free milk or yogurt or 1½ ounces low-fat or fat-free cheese (about the size of 3 stacked dice).



HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [heart.org](https://www.heart.org) to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at [HeartInsight.org](https://www.heartinsight.org).
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at [heart.org/SupportNetwork](https://www.heart.org/SupportNetwork).

Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

How many calories should I eat each day?

What's a good cookbook with healthy recipes?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit [heart.org/AnswersByHeart](https://www.heart.org/AnswersByHeart) to learn more.