HEART- HEALTHY EATING

A guide on the right food to eat for a healthier heart.

Francesca Attard Baldacchino - August 2015
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The author makes no representation, expressed or implied, with regards to the accuracy of the information present in this booklet, and cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may be made.

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Some Facts

♥ A healthy, balanced diet is crucial to avoid cardiovascular disease\(^1\), the disease being the source of 40% of deaths in Malta in 2013.\(^2\)

♥ Heart disease includes various conditions characterized by the build-up of fatty deposits in the walls of arteries. This causes the narrowing of arteries in turn limiting blood flow. This may trigger a heart attack or stroke.\(^3\)
A healthy diet AND a healthy lifestyle both help fight cardiovascular disease (CVD). One can help prevent such CVD events via lifestyle changes⁴:
Certain constituents of our diet play a major role in the development and prevention of CVD. These include:

- **Cholesterol**: two types: LDL is the ‘bad’ cholesterol - it leads to fatty deposits in arteries, HDL is the ‘good’ cholesterol- helps remove the ‘bad’ cholesterol.

- **Fats**: Saturated (‘bad’ fats)- High levels can increase cholesterol levels.
  
  Unsaturated (‘good’ fats)- Help reduce cholesterol levels:
  
  Monounsaturated fats (MUFAs)  ex: Olive oil, avocados, nuts
  
  Polyunsaturated fats (PUFAs) (omega 3, 6, 9) ex: oily fish -salmon, mackerel
  
  Trans fats: (‘bad’ fats): Increase the levels of the ‘bad’ cholesterol.

- **Antioxidants**: Naturally occurring molecules that help prevent heart disease.

- **Fibre**: Improves cholesterol levels and induces a feeling of fullness.
It is important to know which foods are healthy for the heart compared to others:

**Right Food**
- Fruit & Vegetables: Antioxidants, vitamins, Low in Saturated fats, Fibre
- Whole grains, Nuts: Fibre, MUFAs, Nuts: Antioxidants, vitamins
- Fish, Skinless Poultry: Low in saturated fats, Fish: PUFAs
- Low-fat Dairies: Low in saturated fats

**Wrong Food**
- Red Meats: High in saturated fats, High in cholesterol
- Sugary beverages and foods: High in calories = ↑ Body weight
- Alcohol: ↑ Blood Pressure
- Salt: ↑ Blood Pressure
### Food examples and Food Servings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food group</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Number of recommended servings</th>
<th>Example of 1 serving for daily intake of 2000 calories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fruit &amp; Vegetables</td>
<td>All fruit and vegetables are healthy</td>
<td>4-5 servings per day</td>
<td>1 medium fruit, ½ cup fruit/ vegetable juice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish(^9)</td>
<td>Oily fish: Salmon, Mackerel, Herrings</td>
<td>Minimum of 2 servings per week</td>
<td>3 oz grilled fish</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Whole grains</strong></td>
<td>Whole grain rice, wholemeal pasta/ bread</td>
<td>6-8 servings per day</td>
<td>1 slice bread, ½ cup cereal/ cooked pasta/ rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poultry, Lean meats</strong></td>
<td>Chicken, Turkey</td>
<td>Less than 6 oz (cooked) per day</td>
<td>3 oz cooked meat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Low fat dairy products</td>
<td>Milk, Yogurt (1% or fat-free)</td>
<td>2-3 servings daily (adults)</td>
<td>1 cup milk/ yogurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuts</td>
<td>Almonds, peanuts, walnuts</td>
<td>4 servings per week</td>
<td>1/3 cup/small handful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Added Sugars</td>
<td>Soft drinks, cakes, sweets</td>
<td>5 or fewer servings per week</td>
<td>1 Tablespoon sugar, 1 cup soft-drink</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Important tips

✓ Canned beans: Rinse to remove any excess salt\(^{11}\)
✓ Nuts: Choose unsalted/ unoiled variants or else wrap the nuts in a tissue to remove excess salt\(^{11}\)
✓ Whole grains: Cannot identify from the brown colour, always check the food label and search for ‘whole / whole grain’.\(^{12}\)*
✓ Low- fat dairy products: Choose low fat cheeses, yoghurt ‘light’, low fat/ zero/ 0.3% fat Benna milk\(^4\)
✓ Salt: Avoid adding table salt to meals. Always check food labels to compare the salt content of packaged foods. \(^{13}\)*
✓ Poultry: Always remove the skin from chicken/ turkey.\(^{13}\)
Fish: Speak to your doctor as you may need omega-3 supplements in addition to your dietary omega-3.¹⁰

Fruit & Vegetables: Be colourful with your plates to take in all important nutrients. Choose canned fruit in water or natural syrup.¹⁴

*Food labels show the ingredients in a food item. It is important to read them to choose products with lowest levels of: sodium (salt), saturated fats, added sugars (fructose, dextrose, maltose, sucrose, glucose) and trans fats (partially hydrogenated oils).¹⁵, ¹⁶
Wise Choices

- **INSTEAD OF** Red Meats (pork, beef, lamb) **CHOOSE** Chicken, turkey, fish, beans.¹⁴
- **INSTEAD OF** White bread/ pasta/ rice **CHOOSE** Whole grain/meal rice/ pasta/ bread. ⁴
- **INSTEAD OF** 1 tablespoon butter **CHOOSE** 1 tablespoon soft margarine.¹⁷
- **INSTEAD OF** 1 egg **CHOOSE** 2 egg-whites.¹⁷
- **INSTEAD OF** sweets, cakes, biscuits, ice-cream **CHOOSE** dried/ frozen/ fresh fruit, frozen yogurt, low-fat ice-cream, fruit products (natural sugars).¹⁷
- **INSTEAD OF** soft – drinks, juices **CHOOSE** diet/ sugar-free drinks, water. ⁴
**Tips for Healthier Cooking**

- **Red meat**: Remove fat off the edges, choose lean meats, pour off any melted fat.
- **Poultry**: Use breasts instead of legs and thighs and remove any skin.
- **Seasonings**: Avoid salt. Instead use lemon juice, herbs, garlic, vinegar, olive oil.
- **Dressings**: Avoid butter, gravy, cream sauce. Use olive oil, vinegar.
- **Cooking**: Do not fry—this adds more calories and fats to the meal. Use roasting, grilling, baking, poaching, steaming, stir-frying.
Cream: Instead of this use low-fat/ nonfat yogurt

Oils: Use non-fat cooking sprays or liquid vegetable oils (ex: olive oil, corn oil, sunflower oil) Avoid coconut oil, palm oil.

SUPERFOODS¹⁹: Very healthy foods as rich in good nutrients for the heart. Some can also be used in recipes, such as:

Salmon- rich in Omega-3 and low in saturated fats

Dark chocolate- very rich in antioxidants but high in calories

Berries – very rich in antioxidants

Pumpkin- contains high levels of vitamin A, fiber and low in calories
References


10. American Heart Association [Internet]. Dallas: The Association; c2015 [updated 2015 Jun 15; cited 2015 Aug 03]. Fish and Omega-3 Fatty Acids; [about 2 screens]. Available from: http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/NutritionCenter/HealthyDietGoals/Fish-and-Omega-3-Fatty-Acids_UCM_303248_Article.jsp


