

Take Care of Your Heart by Eating Lean

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With hearts all around us this month, don't forget to take care of the most important one – yours! Eating a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol can decrease the risk of heart disease in many people.

Saturated fat tends to raise blood cholesterol levels and is found in whole milk dairy foods, beef fat, and lard. It also is found in coconut, palm, and palm kernel oils. Cholesterol is a fat-like substance that is part of all human and animal cells. It is needed to form hormones, cell membranes, and other body substances. Your body is able to make cholesterol in the liver, so it is not needed in your diet. Some cholesterol in our diet is okay, but many adult Americans take in more than is recommended. Dietary cholesterol comes from foods from animal sources.

Coronary heart disease occurs when the arteries supplying the heart with blood become clogged. Cholesterol, fat, and other substances are deposited in the inner lining of the arteries, causing them to thicken and harden. As a result, the passageways in the arteries become smaller, making it more difficult for blood to flow to the heart. Over time, the arteries may become completely blocked, blood flow to the heart is significantly reduced, and a heart attack occurs. This condition also is referred to as atherosclerosis, coronary artery disease, and hardening of the arteries.

For a heart-healthy diet, use products listing any fat or oil first less often. Go easy on products with ingredients high in saturated fat; these include butter, cream, lard, cocoa butter, coconut oil, palm oil, and palm kernel oil. Choose the following products more often: canola oil, corn oil, cottonseed oil, olive oil, peanut oil, safflower oil, soybean oil, sesame oil, and sunflower oil.

Other ways to cut down on fats:

- Use low-fat or fat-free milk instead of whole milk.
- Cut down on the oil or fat in recipes. Start by cutting out about 1/4 of the oil or fat; then cut the oil or fat in half. Some recipes, like stir fried foods, need very little oil. Other recipes, like most cake recipes, cannot be changed without losing quality.
- Use reduced-fat mayonnaise instead of regular mayonnaise. Reduce the amount of mayonnaise used in casseroles.
- Use lean cuts of beef – eye of round, top round, round tip, bottom round, top sirloin - when using beef in a recipe. Trim off all visible fat.
- In casseroles, decrease the amount of meat and increase the amount of vegetables you use.
- Use ground round or ground turkey breast (or a mixture of these) instead of ground chuck.
- Remove skin from poultry before eating. Season the meat, not the skin, before cooking to maintain flavor after the skin is removed.
- Use water-packed tuna instead of tuna packed in oil.
- Season foods with herbs and spices. Stay away from heavy sauces, animal fats, and margarine.
- Substitute low-fat or fat free plain yogurt or mock sour cream for sour cream or mayonnaise.
- Use evaporated fat free milk instead of cream or half-and-half.
- Steam, boil, or bake vegetables more often. Avoid deep frying.
- When stir-frying, use a non-stick wok with vegetable oil spray.
- Roast, bake, broil, or grill meat instead of frying so the fat can drip off and the food does not sit in the fat.
- Chill meat or poultry broth and gravies until fat is solid. Spoon off the fat before using.

For more tips and menu suggestions for a low-fat diet, visit <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/HE/HE69500.pdf> or contact your local county Extension Office.

Source: *Nutrition for Health and Fitness: Fat in Your Diet*, L. B. Bobroff, University of Florida/IFAS Extension, 2002.

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