

Living with Heart Failure: Your Heart-Healthy Diet

Living with heart failure means making changes to your lifestyle, including how you eat.

A heart-healthy diet is an important part of your heart failure treatment plan.

Eating healthy foods can help reduce some of your symptoms, like swelling. It can also support your heart by helping with other conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

But what is a heart-healthy diet?

It's making sure you eat lots of fruits and vegetables, lowering your salt intake, monitoring your fluid intake, eating lean sources of protein, and avoiding excess sugar. Let's take a look at each of these more closely.

Salt, or sodium, causes the body to retain water, which can lead to swelling and high blood pressure.

Your healthcare provider will advise you on how much sodium to eat. For many people with heart failure, the limit is no more than 1,500 mg daily.

Look at both the serving size and the sodium amount. The serving size is found at the top of the label, usually right under the "Nutrition Facts" title. The amount of sodium is given in the nutrient list. It is given in milligrams.

Learning to identify which foods have a lot of salt, is a great place to start.

Avoid highly processed and pre-packaged foods, and don't add salt to your food while cooking, or while eating.

And use alternative ways to flavor your food.

Eat a diet rich in colorful fruits and vegetables.

They are loaded with healthy nutrients and goodness that your body needs.

Fat-free or Low-fat dairy products are also healthy when eaten in moderation.

Make sure to read the labels because many dairy products have lots of added sugars.

Excess sugar can increase your risk of obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes.

Sugar has many names, including high fructose corn syrup, sucrose, fructose, and natural sweeteners like honey and agave.

When it comes to protein, the key is to focus on lean proteins. This includes skinless chicken, non-fried fish, beans and lean and extra-lean meat.

Believe it or not, there are healthy fats that are good for your heart. Cold-water fish like salmon is one example.

In general, try to focus on healthy monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. These are found in foods like olive, canola, soybean and corn oils, avocados, and flax seeds.

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Most unsalted, roasted nuts are also good snacks and have heart-healthy fats and protein.

Avoid or limit saturated and trans fats. These are common in fried foods, shortening, stick margarine, frozen pizza, baked goods, highly processed foods, fatty meats like red meat, and coconut and palm oils. These fats damage your arteries and heart.

You can find the amount of these fats in the foods you buy by reading the Nutrition label.

Finally, you should ask your doctor about whether you can drink alcohol at all and whether it will interact with your medications.

By eating a heart-healthy diet, you can help manage conditions that can make heart failure worse.

This can mean fewer symptoms, more ability to do the things that you want to do and feeling better.