

Healthy Living After a Heart Attack: Nutrition

Making healthy lifestyle changes like eating healthier foods will help you recover after a heart attack.

It will also help you manage some of your risk factors for heart disease.

Here are some nutrition tips to keep you on track.

Let's start with fats. There are several types of fats. Some are healthier than others.

Healthy fats include monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats.

When you choose these healthy fats over saturated fats, you can help lower your LDL, or bad, cholesterol level.

Foods that are high in healthy monounsaturated fats include olive oil, canola oil, peanut oil, avocados, and unsalted nuts and nut butters, such as peanut and almond.

Polyunsaturated fats can be found in the greatest amounts in foods such as: sesame, sunflower, soybean, and corn oils; unsalted walnuts, pine nuts; and sunflower and flax seeds.

Unhealthy fats include saturated fat and trans-fat. These kinds of fats can raise LDL, or bad, cholesterol. An elevated LDL level can make heart disease worse.

Saturated fat and trans-fat can be found in red meat, lard, full-fat dairy products, tropical oils like coconut and palm kernel oils, hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils, hard margarine or shortening, and highly processed foods, such as fried foods and baked goods.

For carbohydrates, aim for foods that have lots of fiber. The easiest way to find these foods is to look for whole grains on the ingredient list. The first ingredient should read "whole grain."

Stay away from foods that are high in added sugars, like cakes, cookies, pies, candies and desserts.

Foods made with whole grains are good for your heart, and they are more filling, so you will feel full for longer, with smaller portion sizes.

When it comes to protein, try to focus on lean proteins, like skinless chicken breast or oily fish, such as salmon, lake trout, herring, and mackerel.

Most of us eat too much sodium, so compare nutrition labels and choose the product with the lowest amount of sodium per serving.

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Sodium is found in table salt, as well as processed foods, such as cold cuts, cured meats, cheese, dips, sauces, soups, pizza, fast food sandwiches and burgers, burritos, tacos, breads and rolls, poultry with high sodium content, savory snacks and many convenience foods like canned goods and TV dinners.

In general, it's always best to choose a variety of healthy foods that are not highly processed. These foods tend to have less saturated and trans fats, sodium, added sugars, and calories than processed foods. Fruits and vegetables are great choices.

Check out the American Heart Association's website at www.heart.org for more healthy eating tips.

And finally, control your portion sizes. Many of us eat more food than we need, and the excess calories can show up as extra weight.

Talk to your healthcare provider about what portion sizes are right for you.

If you have questions about what's best to eat, ask your cardiac care team to schedule you an appointment with a dietitian.

A dietitian can help you develop an eating plan that's right for you.

Eating nutritious foods will not only lower your heart disease risk factors. It will also help you live a longer, healthier life.