

Heart-Healthy Eating: Evidence-Based Diets for Cardiovascular Wellness

Adopting a heart-healthy diet can significantly reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases. Below are three scientifically supported dietary patterns known to promote heart health:

Mediterranean Diet

Overview: Inspired by the traditional eating habits of countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, this diet emphasizes whole foods and healthy fats.

Key Components:

- High intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and nuts
- Primary fat source: olive oil
- Moderate consumption of fish and poultry
- Limited intake of red meat and sweets
- Optional: moderate red wine consumption with meals

Health Benefits:

- Reduces risk of heart disease and stroke
- Lowers LDL (bad) cholesterol levels
- Improves blood pressure and blood sugar control
- Associated with reduced inflammation

Learn More:

- American Heart Association: <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/nutrition-basics/mediterranean-diet>
- PREDIMED Trial (NEJM): <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa18003>

Portfolio Diet

Overview: A plant-based dietary pattern specifically designed to lower LDL cholesterol by incorporating a "portfolio" of cholesterol-lowering foods.

Key Components:

- Nuts (e.g., almonds, walnuts): ~45g/day
- Soluble fiber (e.g., oats, barley, legumes): ~20g/day
- Plant sterols (found in fortified foods): ~2g/day
- Soy protein (e.g., tofu, soy milk): ~50g/day

Health Benefits:

- Lowers LDL cholesterol by up to 30% when followed strictly

- Reduces risk of coronary heart disease and stroke
- Improves overall lipid profile

Learn More:

- Canadian Cardiovascular Society: https://ccs.ca/app/uploads/2020/11/Portfolio_Diet_Scroll_editable_eng.pdf
- Portfolio Diet Trial (JAMA): <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/1104262>

DASH Diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension)

Overview: Developed to combat high blood pressure, the DASH diet emphasizes nutrient-rich foods and reduced sodium intake.

Key Components:

- High in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy
- Includes lean proteins like fish and poultry
- Rich in potassium, calcium, and magnesium
- Limits sodium, sweets, sugary beverages, and red meats

Health Benefits:

- Lowers blood pressure and LDL cholesterol
- Reduces risk of heart disease and stroke
- Supports weight management

Learn More:

- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute – DASH Eating Plan: <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/education/dash-eating-plan>
- DASH Diet Clinical Trial (NEJM): <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJM199704173361601>

Tips for Implementing Heart-Healthy Diets

- **Start Gradually:** Incorporate one or two changes at a time to make the transition manageable.
- **Plan Meals:** Prepare a weekly meal plan to include a variety of heart-healthy foods.
- **Read Labels:** Check nutrition labels for sodium, saturated fat, and added sugars.
- **Cook at Home:** Home-cooked meals allow better control over ingredients and portion sizes.
- **Stay Hydrated:** Opt for water, herbal teas, or other low-calorie beverages.

Note: Always consult with your healthcare provider or a registered dietitian before making significant dietary changes, especially if you have existing health conditions or are on medication.

For more detailed information and personalized advice, consider scheduling an appointment with our clinic's dietitian.

This handout is intended for educational purposes and should not replace professional medical advice.