



Indian Dietetic Association

HEART HEALTHY DIET

Introduction

The ground rules for a healthy heart diet are simple – a varied, predominately plant-based diet, with plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Minimising the use of processed foods is important, as this can control the sugar, fat and salt quantities in the diet.

Cooking methods are as important as choosing the right foods. Methods that help retain the nutrients, such as steaming, simmering and sautéing are preferable to frying.

The following foods of the diet deserve your attention.

Whole grains: These provide the fibre in the diet and ensure the grains that are consumed (in whole form) have all the 3 portions of the grain present, which are bran, endosperm and germ. Whole grains are therefore coarser than refined grains which have only endosperm. Whole grain bread, chapattis, pasta and unpolished rice should be preferred over refined grains. Millets (jowar, bajra, ragi) should also be included in the diet.

Vegetables and fruits: These are sources of micronutrients, antioxidants and fibre, and serve as low calorie and low sodium foods that are also filling. Include deep coloured fruits and vegetables that are available in that season. 5 to 6 portions (1 portion is 100g) of vegetables and fruits in a day is recommended for adults. Avoid fruit juices and consume the whole fruit instead, which is loaded with fibre that keeps the cholesterol and sugar levels under control.

Soy and other legumes: These cholesterol-free, low-saturated fat foods are the ideal replacement for animal protein which is laden with saturated fat. The whole pulses provide the added benefit of fibre, iron, calcium, zinc and B vitamins and omega 3 fats.

Dairy: Dairy is a source of potassium and calcium, which help lower blood pressure. 2 to 3 portions of low fat (not zero fat) dairy products, preferably the fermented products (dahi, lassi, chach) should form a part of a heart healthy diet.

DISCLAIMER

This document is for information purpose only. It acts as a basic guideline for Heart Health. For specific and individual dietary advice and meal plans, please consult a qualified dietitian/nutritionist.

The following foods of the diet deserve your attention.

Nuts: 20-30g of nuts or seeds / day or 150g/ week should be an integral part of this diet for the many beneficial nutrients that it provides including omega 3 fats. Nuts selected could be any of these: walnuts, almonds, pistachio. Amongst the seeds, one could choose from watermelon, cucumber or flaxseed. Nuts should ideally replace the oily snacks that are freely available.

Salt: The salt intake should be minimised by restricting the consumption of salted namkeens, salt biscuits, salty cheese, packaged soups and pickles. Remember that processed foods usually contain high amounts of salt or sodium, which is best avoided. Limit the total intake of salt to 1 teaspoon per day.

Eggs: A source of good quality protein and vitamins including vitamin D, E and B12, 5 eggs a week can be a part of a heart healthy diet.

Fats and oils: The type and quantity of fat/oil are both important. Using a combination of 2 or more oils helps to achieve ideal ratios of fatty acids that are required by the body. One such suggested combination for use is equal amounts of rice bran/sesame/groundnut oil in combination with soy/mustard/canola oil, which are sources of omega 3 fats. The consumption of butter/ghee should be in restricted amounts, while trans fats are best avoided. Food labels should be scrutinised for the presence of trans fats as even small amounts from various food products do add up. Also, make sure that oils are not subjected to frying temperatures, repeatedly.

Alcohol: There is no recommendation to start drinking alcohol for health benefit. For those who regularly drink, limit amounts to 2 drinks/ day for men and one drink/ day for women.

Chocolate: Dark chocolate with a high cocoa content (70%) should be preferred over milk chocolate. However, consumption of chocolates does not play a role in prevention of heart disease.

Green Tea: Regular consumption of 2-3 cups of green tea could lower the risk of heart disease.

Garlic: 2-3 cloves of raw garlic should be included in the daily diet. It can be mixed in salads, chutneys or dips.

In addition to the diet, regular physical activity and exercise keeps the heart healthy. Reducing stress levels with the practice of meditation and controlled breathing exercises is also of great value. Reducing air pollution levels by minimising the use of chemicals at home and growing air purifying plants in your vicinity will add value to improving heart health.