

MONTHLY WELL-BEING NEWSLETTER: EATING FOR A HEALTHY HEART

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, but here's the good news: many heart problems can be prevented through lifestyle choices, especially what you eat. In 2023, 919,032 people died from cardiovascular disease, which is one in every three deaths. Additionally, younger people aged 35-64 are increasingly affected by heart failure, with mortality rates rising faster than in older adults.

These numbers can be overwhelming, but they also highlight an important truth: **taking care of your heart matters at every stage of life.**

In addition to physical activity, managing substance use, and coping with stress, your daily food choices have a significant impact on your heart health.



Keeping It Simple: Heart-Healthy Eating

Load Up on Fruits and Veggies

- + Try to fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables at each meal.

Choose Whole Grains

- + Swap white bread and rice for whole wheat bread, brown rice, and quinoa.

Go for Lean Proteins

- + Fish, chicken, beans, and lentils are excellent choices that support heart health.

Cut Back on Salt and Sugar

- + Nine out of ten Americans consume too much [sodium](#). Six out of ten Americans consume too much [sugar](#).

Be Mindful with Alcohol

- + If you drink, remember that “moderate” drinking is defined as one drink per day for women and one-to-two drinks for men.

Looking for meal ideas? Check out these [delicious heart-healthy recipes](#) from the Mayo Clinic.



What Do Blood Pressure Numbers Mean and Why Are They Important?

Blood pressure is written as two numbers, like 120/80:

- + **Top number (systolic):** The pressure when your heart beats
- + **Bottom number (diastolic):** The pressure when your heart relaxes

If your reading is 120/80, that means your heart pumps with a pressure of 120 and rests at 80.

Why This Matters

High blood pressure (hypertension) is called the “silent killer” because you usually don’t feel it, but over time, it puts strain on your heart and arteries and increases your risk for heart attack and stroke.

Understanding Your Numbers

- + **Normal:** Less than 120/80
- + **Elevated:** 120-129 on top AND less than 80 on the bottom
- + **High (Hypertension Stage 1):** 130-139 on top OR 80-89 on the bottom
- + **High (Hypertension Stage 2):** 140 or higher on top OR 90 or higher on the bottom

Heart Health Goes Beyond Food

While nutrition plays a significant role, your heart also benefits from:

- + Getting good sleep each night
- + Staying physically active
- + Managing stress in healthy ways



Talk to Your Doctor About Your Heart Health

Your next check-up is a good time to:

- + Discuss your family history of heart disease
- + Ask if you’re at risk for heart problems in the future
- + Get your blood pressure checked and understand what your numbers mean

Want to Learn More?

Check out this [Heart Health Video Series](#) from NYU. There are individual videos covering everything related to healthy hearts, from nutrition and exercise to understanding your risk factors.

Taking care of your heart doesn’t require perfection. Small, consistent changes in your eating habits, physical activity, and stress management, can make a significant difference over time.