

Nutrition for Heart Health



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Make this a Heart Healthy Holiday & Festive season ♥

There is a lot to love about summer: longer days, plenty of sunshine, beach/pool/outdoor time, and generally, just feeling more carefree and relaxed. But there is one thing that becomes more difficult during summer. While we are enjoying that easygoing lifestyle, any attempt at healthy eating goes out the window a lot of times.

November is also the month of end-of-year office parties, feeling tired at the end of a long stressful year and therefore, relying on take-out and

convenience foods more, consuming more sweetened drinks during hot days. In recent years, November is also black Friday month, a day to hunt for bargains and specials, and quite often stocking up non-perishable processed or ultra-processed foods.

Followed by the holidays and festive season, a time of socializing with family and friends, having fun and over-indulging! While it is all about living our best lives during the summer season, it's important to balance our summer indulgences with a semblance of healthy eating.

Summer Eating that is Healthy and Fun!

- ❖ Focus on consuming a **diet of mainly unprocessed and minimally processed foods.**

Most of the food we eat today has been **processed** in some way, from salad mix to frozen dinners. Some processed foods have ingredients added, some are fortified to add nutrients, some are prepared for convenience, and some are packaged to last longer or for food safety. Even foods labeled "natural" or "organic" can be processed.

Can processed foods be healthy? ➡ What you need to know



Minimally processed foods have been manipulated (cut, cooked, packaged) in some way.



Some foods are processed with ingredients typically used in cooking, such as salt or sugar.



Highly processed foods are manufactured with ingredients that are not typically used in cooking.

♥ What you can do

1. Enjoy a variety of unprocessed or minimally processed food choices

Choose a variety of foods that are affordable and in season. This can be achieved by drawing up a food budget, keeping this budget in mind when planning for the week ahead and writing down your thoughts in the form of a meal plan and then compiling a shopping list, only buying items that are needed. Enjoying a healthy eating plan also means preparing food in healthy ways, for instance eating raw vegetables and using cooking methods such as boiling, grilling and baking instead of frying.



2. Eat plenty of vegetables and fruit every day

Vegetables should be eaten every day, and not only on weekends.

Try to include a variety of vegetables and fruit in meal plans.

Indigenous vegetables and fruit are good sources of vitamins and minerals and should be included where possible.

Frozen and dried vegetables can be incorporated as part of a healthy eating plan.

Include both cooked and raw vegetables and salads in meals.

Eat a yellow vegetable (carrots, pumpkin, butternut) or a dark green vegetable (broccoli, spinach,) at least once a day.



3. Eat dry beans, peas, lentils and soya regularly

Soaking beans and chickpeas overnight in plenty of water will reduce cooking time and help to reduce bloating. Drain the soaking water and use fresh water for cooking. Try not to cook dry beans, peas or lentils together as each has its distinct cooking time. Dry beans, peas and lentils should be thoroughly cooked until they are tender and drained well. Add seasonings such as bay leaves, onion, garlic and/or pepper corns when cooking, but leave salt, acidic foods and condiments, such as tomatoes, lemon juice and vinegar until after cooking as it can harden beans. Add herbs and spices near the end of the cooking.



4. Plan and prepare healthy home meals rather than buying ready-to-eat food/meals/snacks or eating out regularly.

Draw up a budget for food. Have an amount in mind and do your best to stick to it. Look at past receipts as a starting point. Create a menu plan for the week ahead for breakfast, lunch and supper. Be realistic. If you only have 20 minutes to prepare a meal, then do not choose a recipe that is complicated. Plan meals that are mostly plant-based, i.e. vegetables, fruit, legumes and preferably minimally processed starchy foods. If you have the capacity, double the amounts when preparing regularly eaten foods such as brown rice or dry beans/peas/lentils. You can also do the same with your favourite family recipes so that these leftovers can be eaten on the other days of the week or can be frozen or thawed when needed. Plan to use leftovers for a few breakfasts, lunches or dinners throughout the week to reduce time spent cooking.



Some healthy convenience foods:

- a bowl of cereal with low-fat milk
 - plain yoghurt topped with fruit and nuts or oats
 - wholegrain toast with peanut butter or avocado
 - wholegrain biscuits with hummus.
- ❖ If you are finding meal preparation to be too difficult or time consuming, try the following tips to create healthy meals for yourself every day of the week:

Cook in bulk and freeze leftover portions in single-serve size containers ready to just heat and eat.

Shop and cook with a friend. Spending time with others can also be great for improving your mood.

Consider a food swap. Trade extra portions of meals that you have cooked with a friend in a similar situation.

Keep plenty of convenient meal options on hand. Frozen vegetables are fantastic as they keep for ages and don't require any chopping. Tinned fish and canned beans are convenient sources of protein that you can use to top toast or stir into pasta or rice.

If you crave something sweet, fresh fruit should always be the priority. Frozen fruits, canned fruits in juice rather than syrup, and dried fruits with no added sugar are also good options.

When other dessert options are chosen, ensure that they are low in sugar and consume small portions. Watch out for low fat options, as these are often high in added sugars.





This festive season, you don't need to deprive yourself, eat only boring foods, or take your treats with a side order of guilt.

12 tips for healthy holiday eating

1. **Budget wisely.** Don't eat everything at feasts and parties. Be choosy and spend calories judiciously on the foods you love.
2. **Take 10 before taking seconds.** It takes a few minutes for your stomach's "I'm getting full" signal to get to your brain. After finishing your first helping, take a 10-minute break. Make conversation. Drink some water. Then recheck your appetite. You might realize you are full or want only a small portion of seconds.
3. **Distance helps the heart stay healthy.** At a party, don't stand next to the food table. That makes it harder to mindlessly reach for food as you talk. If you know you are prone to recreational eating, pop a mint or a stick of gum so you won't keep reaching for the chips.
4. **Don't go out on an empty stomach.** Before setting out for a party, eat something so you don't arrive famished. Excellent pre-party snacks combine complex carbohydrates with protein and unsaturated fat, like apple slices with peanut butter or a slice of turkey and cheese on whole-wheat pita bread.
5. **Drink to your health.** Wine, beer, and mixed drinks range from 630 to 950 kilojoules. If you drink alcohol, have a glass of water or iced tea or fresh fruit juice mixed with sparkling water in between drinks.
6. **Avoid alcohol on an empty stomach.** Alcohol increases your appetite and diminishes your ability to control what you eat.
7. **Put on your dancing (or walking) shoes.** Dancing is a great way to work off some holiday calories. If you are at a family gathering, suggest a walk before the feast or even between dinner and dessert.
8. **Make room for veggies.** At meals and parties, don't ignore fruits and vegetables. They make great snacks and even better side or main dishes — unless they're slathered with creamy sauces or butter.
9. **Be buffet savvy.** At a buffet, wander 'round the food table before putting anything on your plate. By checking out all of your options, you might be less inclined to pile on items one after another.
10. **Don't shop hungry.** Eat before you go shopping so the scent of cake or caramel popcorn doesn't tempt you to gobble treats you don't need.
11. **Cook from (and for) the heart.** To show family and friends that you *really* care about them, be creative with recipes that use less butter, cream, lard, vegetable shortening, and other ingredients rich in saturated fats. Prepare chicken or fish instead of red meat.
12. **Be mindful and pay attention to what really matters.** Although food is an integral part of the holidays, put the focus on family and friends, laughter and cheer. If balance and moderation are your usual guides, it's okay to indulge or overeat once in a while.

