

Healthy Holidays

Heart-healthy foods for the year ahead

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, heart disease is the leading cause of death in both men and women. Certain factors beyond an individual's control, such as family history and age, affect his or her risk of developing heart disease, but men and women are not helpless against heart disease.

Diet can be a friend or foe with regard to heart disease. A bad diet may elevate a person's risk for high blood pressure, heart attack or stroke, while a diet rich in heart-healthy foods can lower that risk. The following are a handful of heart-healthy foods for men and women who want to begin the new year on a nourishing foot.

- **Raisins:** Researchers from the Louisville Metabolic and Atherosclerosis Research Center found that consuming raisins three times a day may significantly lower blood pressure among individuals with mild increases in blood pressure. Raisins can help combat the growth of a type of bacteria that causes gum disease, which few people may know is linked to heart disease. In lieu of reaching for cookies or potato chips come snack time, opt for heart-healthy raisins instead.

- **Salmon:** Though its label as a fatty fish may lead some to question its nutritional properties, salmon is rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which can decrease a person's risk of developing an abnormal heartbeat (arrhythmia), slightly lower blood pressure and slow the growth of atherosclerotic plaque, the buildup of which can contribute to heart attack, stroke or even death. Albacore tuna, herring and lake trout are additional examples of heart-healthy fatty fish.

- **Whole grains:** Whole grains help men and women maintain healthy weights while lowering their risk for heart disease, making them perfect dietary additions for anyone who resolves to lose weight and protect their heart in the year ahead. According to the American Heart Association, whole grains, such as whole wheat, oats/oatmeal, rye, barley, and brown rice, are great sources of



dietary fiber, while refined grains like white rice and enriched bread contain little fiber. That's an important distinction, as dietary fiber can improve blood cholesterol levels and lower risk of heart disease and stroke.

- **Tomatoes:** Researchers at Boston's Tufts University analyzed more than a decade's worth

of data in an effort to discover the effects of lycopene, which is the antioxidant responsible for giving tomatoes their familiar red color, on the cardiovascular system. They ultimately discovered that people who regularly consumed foods with lycopene over an 11-year period reduced their risk of coronary heart disease by 26

percent. The lycopene found in tomatoes may be even more accessible when they are cooked.

Aspiring to eat healthier is a goal for many people come the dawn of a new year. For more information about heart-healthy foods, visit www.heart.org.

Include good fats and carbs in a healthy eating plan

Come the end of the holiday season, many people resolve to rest, recharge and get back to healthy eating habits.

Time magazine reports that losing weight and getting fit are the most popular New Year's resolutions, but also the ones that people are most likely to abandon after a short time. That may be because New Year's dieters are too often choosing diets that are impractical and not conducive to long-term success. Some may stop eating certain foods or ingredients entirely, while others look to diets that require a level of commitment beyond busy adults' capabilities.

Many fad diets target fat and carbohydrates, but dieters may not know that fat and carbs are necessary for a healthy metabolism. According to Dr. Walter Willett of the Harvard School of Public Health, low-fat diets don't work for many people. In fact, dozens of studies have found that low-fat diets are no more healthy than moderate- or high-fat diets and may, in fact, be worse. Foods that are low in fat may be full of ingredients that can be detrimental when eaten in high amounts. Processed low-fat foods can be made to taste better with copious amounts of salt or sugar. Some low-fat foods are actually high in simple carbohydrates, which can cause spikes in blood sugar and increase bad fats called triglycerides in the blood.

Simple carbohydrates are generally those that break down fast and do not provide much value beyond the initial energy burst. Although some simple carbs, such as fructose and lactose, can be beneficial and are

generally found in healthy foods, it's best to avoid simple carbs.

Eating healthy doesn't mean avoiding carbohydrates and fats altogether. The key is to find good fats and carbs that provide a host of benefits. Good fats, such as mono-unsaturated fats, polyunsaturated fats, and omega-3 fatty acids, help to manage mood, maintain mental acuity, fight fatigue, and control weight. Good fats are largely found in olives, nuts, legumes, soy, and fatty fish. Keep total fat intake to 20 to 30 percent of your calories.

Good carbs are complex carbohydrates. They're starches that take a longer time to metabolize in your digestive system. Good carbs will raise blood sugar, but they will keep it at a stable level for an extended period of time. Complex carbs usually contain a lot

of fiber, which can help keep a person feeling full for long periods of time. Plus, they help keep digestion moving smoothly to help you avoid constipation. Fibrous vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and beans are high in fiber and are good carbohydrate choices. Some foods contain both good carbs and good fats.

Eating healthy means finding a balance that includes the right fats and carbohydrates.



Did you know?

Exercise is a great way to maintain a healthy mind and body. Many people begin a new year by making resolutions to lose weight or build muscle. Too often, however, men and women get stuck in an exercise rut, following the same exercise routine week after week. Not only can this be boring, fitness experts advise that it's necessary to change an exercise routine periodically to continue to see results. It's one reason why many fitness clubs unveil new classes every few weeks. Just when you master the choreography of a class, it's time to change! With repetition, the body adapts and grows accustomed to the routine, using less energy as a result. That can affect your ability to lose weight. Changing your workout forces your body to work harder, producing better results. If you exercise with a trainer, discuss ways to modify your normal routine to surprise your body. Increased intensity, interval training, adding sprints to running, taking different classes, or even increasing the frequency of your workouts may do the trick.

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