

Heart-healthy foods



With February being Heart Month in the United States, it is a good time to add these heart-healthy foods to your diet. Make these seven foods part of your diet to prevent heart disease:

1. Salmon contains the healthy fat, omega-3 fatty acids, which helps to lower triglycerides. High triglyceride levels are linked to hardening of the arteries or atherosclerosis, which is the leading cause of heart attack, stroke and peripheral vascular disease.

This fish also has anti-inflammatory properties, slightly lowers blood pressure and decreases risk for cardiac arrhythmias. Two 3.5-ounce servings per week of salmon or other omega-3 rich fish is recommended by The American Heart Association. Try a tuna fish sandwich for lunch one day and salmon or trout for dinner one night.

2. Oats, like oatmeal, steel-cut, rolled and quick-cooking oats, provide a type of soluble fiber, beta-glucan. Fiber helps to lower blood levels of cholesterol. Start with 1 1/2 cups of cooked oatmeal for breakfast for 3 grams of soluble fiber, half of the recommended daily 6-8 grams.

3. Nuts of all types provide heart-healthy benefits because they contain fiber, vitamin E and magnesium. Specifically, walnuts contain a plant version of the heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids, alpha-linolenic acid (ALA).

Almonds, pecans and cashews are particularly rich in monounsaturated fat, which helps to lower LDL, “bad” cholesterol levels, while raising HDL, or good cholesterol levels. Four times a week work in a handful or 1.5 ounces of nuts for a small snack.

4. Apples are high in pectin, a soluble fiber that helps lower cholesterol levels. The skin is where

Extension Corner

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most of the pectin is found, so keep the skin on. Eat one large apple a day to meet the recommended 4-5 cups of fruit and vegetables each day. So, it is true—an apple a day does help keep the doctor away.

5. Whole flaxseed that is ground will release the plant omega-3 fatty acids. Then add 1 tablespoon of ground flaxseed to oatmeal, cereals or yogurt every day to reap the benefits. Because ground flaxseed can spoil quickly, buy the seeds, store them in the freezer and grind them when you want to use them in your favorite foods.

6. Brown rice benefits heart health by providing fiber and B vitamins. It is recommended to eat 3-5 servings of whole grains daily. Prepare for a dinner 1/2 cup of brown rice as a serving, along with steamed vegetables.

7. Spinach reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, lowers cholesterol and blood pressure with its rich folate, antioxidants, calcium, potassium and fiber content. Spinach is good hot or cold. A salad with 1/2 cup of cooked spinach or 1 cup of fresh spinach is a great addition to any dinner.

Remember that being heart-healthy also means reducing the intake of fried foods, store-bought baked goods, fatty cuts of beef and pork, full-dairy foods and processed foods like chips, deli meats and convenience foods.

In addition, limit your sugar intake and use unsaturated fats like olive and canola oils and spreads made from these vegetable oils instead of butter. Finally, be sure to include lean animal proteins such as seafood and skinless poultry as part of your heart-healthy diet.

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