

P E N N S Y L V A N I A

Health & Fitness

M A G A Z I N E



**You Keep Your Outside Fit...
What About Your Inside?**

- How to Monitor Your Personal Health
- Living Smart for Your Health
- Healthy Technology



FEEL GOOD EATING

With coronary heart disease still ranking as the #1 killer among Americans, it's time that we stop and take a look at how we can prevent this deadly disease. Although having a family history of heart disease does increase our risk, it's important to banish the blame and take a look at the other risk factors that are in our control:

1. Eat Smaller Meals

A recent study from the American Heart Association found that eating large meals raises your risk of heart attack by about four times, up to two hours after the meal! Portion control is key, because eating too much in one sitting puts extra stress on the heart, especially because the blood flow is directed away from the heart and towards the stomach for digestion, and so the heart has to work that much harder to maintain a constant flow of blood to the rest of the body. In addition to decreasing stress on the heart, controlling portion sizes will help you keep your weight in check, which is another important factor for decreasing risk of heart disease.

Research has also suggested that eating smaller meals, more frequently throughout the day, can positively affect cholesterol levels, thereby reducing heart disease risk. A recent study published in *The British Medical Journal* found that people who ate 6 or more small meals had lower cholesterol levels than people who ate one or two large meals each day. This supports earlier research published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, which found that "nibbling" (i.e. consuming 17 snacks per day) showed metabolic advantages as compared to "gorging" (consuming only 3 meals/day), including lowered total and LDL ("bad") cholesterol levels. Both "nibbling" and "gorging" diets were equal in total calories.

Portion control is simple. Keep your fish and chicken to 3 ounces—which is about the size of the palm of your hand, or a deck of cards, and your pasta and rice to one cup—or about the size of your fist. Also, invest in some measuring spoons and cups—this will enable you to get familiar with the portion sizes of different foods, and you will eventually be able to eyeball servings. And remember—avoid seconds, unless they're vegetables!

2. Include More Fruits, Vegetables, and Low-fat Dairy Foods, and Limit the Sodium in Your Diet

A recent study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* known as DASH-Sodium (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) showed that following a heart-healthy diet with limited amounts of

sodium can greatly reduce blood pressure, a risk factor for heart disease.

The study followed two groups. One was asked to consume a DASH diet—a diet incorporating lots of fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy foods, and limiting red meat, sweets, and saturated fats. In previous research, this diet was shown to lower blood pressure levels substantially. Another was given a "typical" American diet. Different sodium levels, including 3,300, 2,400, and 1,500 mg were given to the individuals every four weeks. The study found that the individuals following the DASH diet and limiting sodium to 1500 mg/day experienced the greatest reduction in blood pressure—in fact, as compared to the "typical" diet with 3,300 mg of sodium, the DASH diet with 1500mg of sodium led to a decrease of 11.5 points (systolic) among individuals with high blood pressure, and a 7.1 point decrease among individuals without high blood pressure. For both diets, however, the greater the reduction in sodium, the lower the blood pressure.

While it's a fact that not everyone is sodium sensitive—that is, they experience an increase in blood pressure with high sodium intakes and a decrease in blood pressure with low sodium intakes—it still won't hurt to cut back on salt. Keep in mind that most of the sodium in our diet comes from processed food—such as canned soups and sauces, cured meats, and fast foods.

3. Avoid Foods High in Saturated Fats and Trans Fats, and Consume More Monounsaturated Fats and Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Saturated fats in the diet increase cholesterol levels even moreso than dietary cholesterol! Specifically, saturated fats increase LDL, or the "bad" cholesterol, and decrease HDL levels, also known as the "good" cholesterol. Sources of saturated fats include: butter, lard, cream, full-fat dairy products, red meat, palm oil, and coconut oil. It's best to limit these foods much as possible.

By increasing LDL cholesterol to the same extent as saturated fats, trans fats (formed when vegetable oils undergo a process known as "hydrogenation") also increase risk of heart disease. Trans fats are found in margarine, French fries, and commercially prepared foods such as cookies and cakes. Right now, trans fats are not required to be written on food labels. (That will hopefully change soon). So in the meantime, look for the words "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil" on food labels—if this listed as one of the first ingredients on a food label, and if the food is high in

**Eating Smart for
Your Heart**

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