



Nutrition for Older Adults: Diet and Health Guidelines to Lower The Risk Of Heart Disease

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Heart Disease

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. However, deaths due to heart disease are decreasing. Progress in medicine and changes in lifestyle habits account for much of this decrease. It may only take a few simple changes to reduce your risk of heart disease.

Heart disease is often caused by atherosclerosis. Atherosclerosis is a process where plaque slowly builds up in the blood vessel wall over many years. These deposits can narrow the blood vessels.

Over time a blood vessel may become blocked because of the plaque itself or because a blood clot in the narrowed portion of a blood vessel.

When a blood vessel is blocked, blood and oxygen cannot reach cells in nearby tissues. The lack of oxygen can cause damage to that tissue.

If a blockage occurs in a vessel going to the heart, it can cause a heart attack. If it occurs in a vessel going to the brain, it can cause a stroke.

Risk Factors for Heart Disease

There are many factors which can increase your risk of heart disease. Factors may increase risk by contributing to:

- Plaque formation.
- Plaque rupture.
- Blood clotting.

Some risk factors cannot be changed:

- Increasing age.
- Gender.
- Family history of heart disease.

Some risk factors can be changed:

- High LDL cholesterol.
- Low HDL cholesterol.
- High blood pressure.
- Diabetes.
- Obesity (especially in the abdominal area).
- Physical inactivity.
- Smoking.
- Diet high in saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol.
- Diet low in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, seafood and low-fat milk.

Lowering The Risk of Heart Disease

Some guidelines to help lower the risk of heart disease are:

- Maintain a healthy weight. Maintaining a healthy weight or moderate weight loss can help:
 - Lower LDL cholesterol.
 - Lower blood pressure.
 - Prevent or help control diabetes.
- Be physically active each day. Regular physical activity can help:
 - With weight control.
 - Lower LDL cholesterol.

- Lower blood pressure.
- Raise HDL cholesterol.
- With glucose control.
- Physical activity guidelines are:
 - At least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a week, or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity a week, or an equivalent combination of moderate and vigorous-intensity physical activity.
- Choose foods with less total fat, saturated fat and trans fat. When consuming fats choose more polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats and oils. Keeping total fat intake within recommended levels and choosing unsaturated fats and oils over saturated and trans fats can help:
 - Lower LDL cholesterol.
 - With weight control.
 - Lower risk of high blood pressure.
- Consume ample fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, seafood and low-fat milk.

These foods provide helpful nutrients:

- Fiber, antioxidants and omega-3 fatty acids which may help lower the risk of atherosclerosis.
- Potassium, calcium and magnesium which may help lower the risk of high blood pressure.
- Choose foods with less added salt and sodium.
 - Keeping sodium within recommended levels can help lower blood pressure among sodium sensitive people.
- Use alcohol in moderation.
 - Moderate alcohol intake can help lower blood pressure.
 - Moderate alcohol intake is not more than one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men.
- Abstain from smoking.
 - Smoking can raise blood pressure and heart rate and lower HDL cholesterol. Smoking can also increase the risk of blood clots.

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