



A well-balanced diet is key to maintaining a healthy heart and lowering the risk of heart disease.

February is American Heart Month, a time to raise awareness about cardiovascular health and how to keep your heart in top condition. Are you taking steps to protect your heart? You can actively reduce your risk for heart disease by adopting a healthy diet, staying physically active, and managing your cholesterol and blood pressure.

Heart disease is responsible for nearly [one-third of all deaths worldwide](#). Experts and research consistently emphasize exercise as a key factor in maintaining heart health, but diet also plays a major role in lowering the risk of heart disease. A balanced diet, mindful portion sizes, and enjoying the foods you eat are essential to long-term success in heart health.

Let’s take a closer look at four key components of a heart-healthy diet and how you can incorporate them into your daily routine:

1. Fruits and Vegetables

Leafy greens are packed with vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that support heart health. A review of eight studies found that eating more leafy greens was linked to up to a [16% reduction in heart disease risk](#).

Fruits & Vegetables to Choose	Fruits & Vegetables to Limit
Fresh or frozen vegetables & fruits	Fried or Breaded Vegetables
Low-sodium canned vegetables	Vegetables with creamy sauces
Canned fruit packed in juice or water	Canned fruit packed in heavy syrup

2. Healthy Proteins

Lean meats, poultry, fish, low-fat dairy, and eggs are excellent [sources of protein](#). Legumes such as beans, peas, and lentils offer a low-fat, [plant-based alternative](#). Replacing animal protein with plant-based options (like a black bean burger instead of a beef burger) helps reduce fat and cholesterol intake while increasing fiber.

Proteins to Choose	Proteins to Limit or Avoid
Low-fat dairy products	Full fat milk & sweetened yogurts
Eggs	Processed cheese
Fish	Fried or Breaded meats
Skinless poultry or turkey	Processed meats like hot dogs, sausage & bacon
Legumes	Fatty & marbled meats

3. Healthy Fats:

Not all fats are bad. Foods with [monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats](#) are important for your brain and heart. Limit foods with trans-fats, which increase the risk for heart disease.

Fats to Choose	Fats to Limit
Olive oil	Butter and Hydrogenated Oils
Nuts, Seeds	Desserts
Avocados	Coconut Oil and Palm Oil

4. Whole Grains

[Whole grains](#) are rich in fiber and essential nutrients that help manage blood pressure and support heart health.

Grain Products to Choose	Grain Products to Limit or Avoid
Whole-grain bread, preferably 100%	White Bread
Whole grains such as brown rice and quinoa	Doughnuts and Muffins
Oatmeal (Steel-cut or regular)	Cakes and Pies
Whole Wheat pasta	High-fat snack crackers

Eating heart-healthy is a lifestyle choice—one that involves making nutritious, balanced food choices. What you eat affects nearly every aspect of heart health, including blood pressure, cholesterol, inflammation, and triglycerides. A well-balanced diet is key to maintaining a healthy heart and lowering the risk of heart disease. With a little planning and some simple substitutions, you can make heart-healthy choices a part of your daily life!

