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Eat healthy to avoid a heart attack or stroke

The great thing about healthy eating is that it is really quite simple. Nutritious, balanced meals and healthy snacks may reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke by helping you to manage your weight, keep your blood pressure down, control your blood sugar levels, lower your cholesterol and increase the amount of nutrients available to keep your heart functioning properly. A healthy eating plan may also boost your overall feeling of well-being, giving you more energy and vitality. It may make you look better and feel good about yourself, inside and out.

Five basics to remember

The Heart and Stroke Foundation recommends that in order to help your heart – and body – function at its best, you need to eat food that is high in fibre and lower in fat and salt. As a general rule of thumb, it's best to fill half your plate with vegetables, a quarter with whole grains and the other quarter with lean meat or meat alternatives.

Here are five healthier food choices to help your heart. (Note: serving ranges vary depending on your age and gender):

1. Go for the colour. Orange and dark green vegetables are the healthiest vegetables you can eat. You should include one of both colour every day. August is a great month to load up on all kinds of local foods – from broccoli and dark-green leafy lettuces to orange peppers and carrots. Adults need: 7 to 10 vegetables and fruit a day.
2. Up the whole grains. Choose at least half your servings as whole grains such as brown rice, oatmeal and 100% whole-wheat bread. Adults need: 6 to 8 servings of grain products a day.
3. Get the skinny on milk. Choose lower fat milk such as skim, 1% or 2%, lower fat yogurt and cheese and fortified soy beverages. Adults need: 2 to 3 servings of milk and alternatives a day.
4. Make the leaner choice. Cut the saturated fat by eating chicken, fish and lean meat. Have alternatives

such as beans, lentils and tofu often – they are high in fibre and very low in fat. Eat at least two servings of fish a week. Adult needs: 2 to 3 servings of meat and alternatives.

5. Use the good oils. Choose fats such as canola, olive or soybean oils, non-hydrogenated margarines, lower fat salad dressings and mayonnaise. Adult needs: 30 to 45 mL (2 to 3 tsp) a day.

Carol Dombrow, a dietitian with the Heart and Stroke Foundations Health Check™ program, says that making time to prepare meals at home more often, is a good way to start eating a healthier diet. “I plan

my meals ahead of time to include lots of vegetables, whole grains and lower-fat protein. It helps to use healthy cookbooks and look for Health Check products when shopping.” The Heart and Stroke Foundation dietitians also give these tips when you're heading to the grocery store:

1. Create a shopping list.
2. Shop the produce aisle first.
3. Read the Nutrition Facts table on food packages.
4. Limit saturated fat.
5. Avoid trans fats. Keep salt intake to 2,300 or less a day.

What is a stroke?

A stroke is a sudden loss of brain function. It is caused by the interruption of flow of blood to the brain (ischemic stroke) or the rupture of blood vessels in the brain (hemorrhagic stroke). The interruption of blood flow or the rupture of blood vessels causes brain cells (neurons) in the affected area to die. The effects of a stroke depend on where the brain was injured, as well as how much damage occurred. A stroke can impact any number of areas including your ability to move, see, remember, speak, reason and read and write.

In a small number of cases, stroke-like damage to the brain can occur when the heart stops (cardiac arrest). The longer the brain goes without the oxygen and nutrients supplied by the blood flow, the greater the risk of permanent brain damage. Brain injuries can also result in uncontrolled bleeding and permanent brain damage. This is usually referred to as an Acquired Brain Injury.

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