

A Guide to Heart Healthy Eating

 Total Cardiology® | Rehabilitation



This guide will help you eat well for heart health in three simple steps:

STEP 1:
FOLLOW THE
BALANCED PLATE

This section will outline how a balanced plate can help guide heart healthy diet patterns.

STEP 2:
READ FOOD LABELS

This section will help you learn what to look for on a food label so you can choose healthier options.

STEP 3:
FIND ENJOYMENT IN
COOKING & FOOD

This section outlines strategies for ways to find more enjoyment in food and eating.

If you have any questions or concerns, speak to a member of your healthcare team.

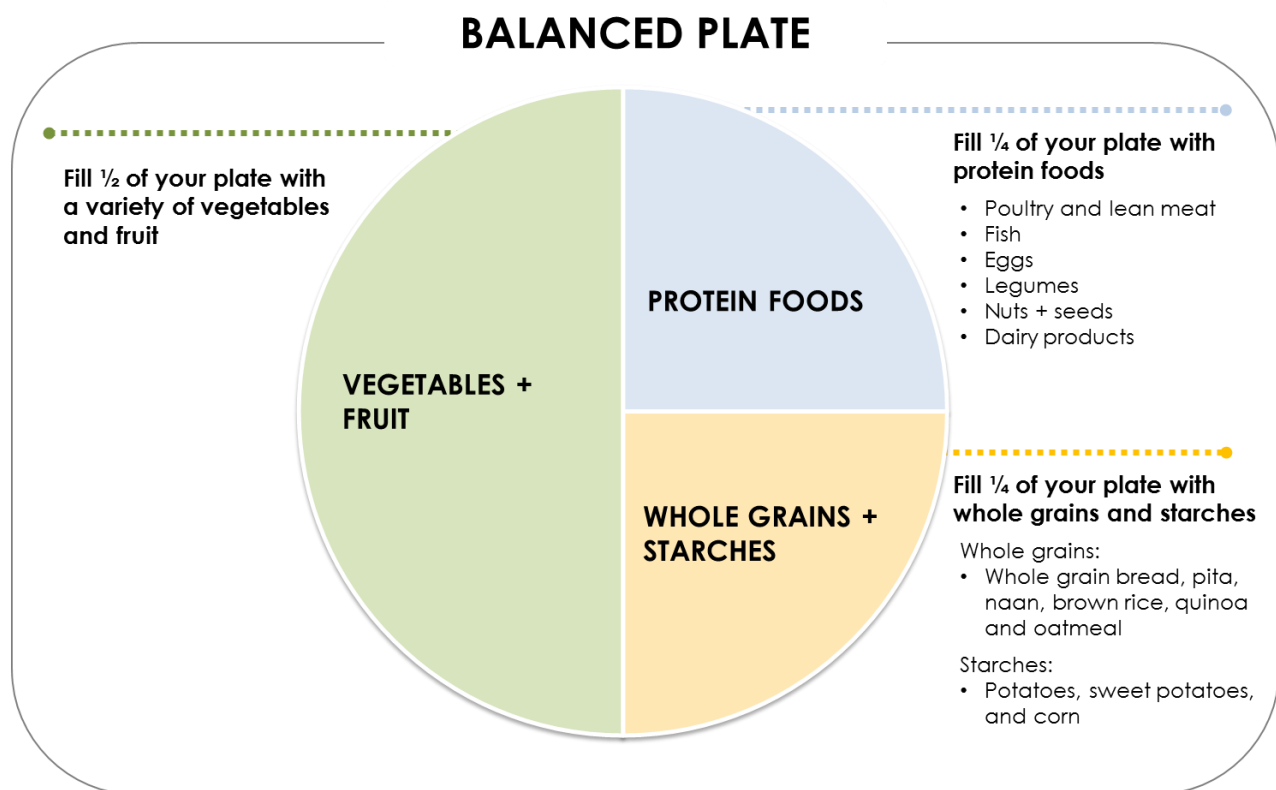
A Guide To Heart Healthy Eating – Step 1

Follow the Balanced Plate

1 USE THE BALANCED PLATE TO GUIDE FOOD CHOICES

The balanced plate shown below can guide you in making heart healthy food choices that can help reduce cholesterol, lower blood pressure and manage blood sugars and appetite.

Think about what your plate typically looks like - is it similar or different to the balanced plate shown below?



How to balance your plate:

- Vegetables + Fruit = half your plate
- Protein Foods = one quarter of your plate
- Whole grains + starches = one quarter of your plate

Once you have built your balanced plate, eat until you reach a level of comfortable fullness. This concept of 'mindful eating' will be discussed in section/step 3.

2 FILL YOUR PLATE WITH HEART HEALTHY FOODS

This section will review the importance of each food group and how you can create a heart healthy balanced plate.

VEGETABLES + FRUIT (1/2 OF BALANCED PLATE)

These nutrient-packed foods provide your body with:

1. **Potassium** → that can help lower blood pressure
2. **Fibre** → that can help manage blood sugar, cholesterol and appetite.

Include plenty of vegetables and fruit in your meals and snacks. There is no “best” choice of vegetable or fruit instead, seek a greater variety. A good plan is to have at least two different colours of vegetables or fruits on your plate.

Fresh, frozen and canned are all equally nutritious choices. Remember to look at ingredient labels and choose those **without** added sugars, salt, or seasonings/sauces.

Dried fruit and fruit juices are more concentrated in sugars and many have added or ‘free’ sugars.

Tips:

- Choose water over juice
- Aim for smaller portions of dried fruit
- Choose fresh fruits and vegetables most often.



WHOLE GRAINS (1/4 OF BALANCED PLATE)

To identify whole grain bread, crackers, cereal or other foods, look for the word “whole grain” in the first item in the ingredient list. ‘Enriched’ flour or just flour, is not whole grain.

Claims like “multi-grain, 100% wheat and 12-grain” do not always refer to whole grain products. Colour also does not indicate whether a product is whole grain or not. It’s best to check labels.

Ingredients: Whole grain whole wheat flour, water, grain blend (flaxseeds, rye flour, sunflower seeds, oat flakes, malted wheat flakes, millet, triticale flakes, sesame seeds, cornmeal, rice flour, buckwheat flour, barley grits), yeast*, sugar (sugar, raisin syrup [raisin solids, water], dry molasses powder), wheat gluten*, oats, vegetable oil (canola or soybean), salt, vinegar, calcium propionate, sorbic acid, soybean lecithin.

It’s not always easy to switch over to whole grains, such as brown rice. Getting used to the change takes time.

TIP!

Make a goal to adapt by mixing whole grain with half of what you currently use. Then try to progress to most of your daily grains to be whole grain. If you find you are still having difficulty making the switch to whole grains, perhaps try a new type of grain. You may not like brown rice but perhaps you will like other whole grains such as barley, bulgur or quinoa.

HEART HEALTHY PROTEINS (1/4 OF BALANCED PLATE)

Protein comes from a variety of sources including meat, fish, eggs and dairy products as well as plant sources of protein such as legumes, nuts, and seeds which are high in fibre and have limited saturated fat.

Legumes, Tofu and Soy-based Foods (aim to eat 2-4 times per week):

- Includes dried and canned beans, lentils, peas and chickpeas, tofu and vegetarian meat substitute, edamame beans, and hummus or bean dips.
- Look for no-salt-added or rinse well under water to reduce sodium content.

Nuts and Seeds (aim to eat 4 or more times per week):

- Includes whole nuts and seeds and nut or seed butter. Choose unsalted nuts and natural nut butter most often.

Fish + Seafood (aim to eat 2 or more times per week):

- Includes fresh, frozen or canned fish and seafood. Fatty fish such as salmon, trout, mackerel, and sardines are higher in omega-3 fats.

Dairy Products

- Includes lower-fat milk and dairy alternatives, yogurt, kefir, cottage cheese, and cheese.
- Cheese, even light cheese, is high in saturated fat so try to limit.
- The protein content of soy and pea milk is a lot like dairy milk, while almond, cashew, coconut, and oat milk are low in protein.
- Choose dairy alternatives that are fortified with calcium + vitamin D.

Eggs

- Includes whole eggs, egg whites, and liquid egg products. Enjoy a variety of protein foods, including a moderate amount of eggs if you like.

Meat (Limit beef, pork, lamb to 1-2 times/week and processed/deli meat to 1 or less times per week)

- Includes poultry, beef, pork, lamb, and game meat. Choose leaner cuts of meat, remove the skin, and trim visible fat. Choose unprocessed fresh or frozen meat without added breading, seasoning, or marinades most often.



How many times a week are you eating meat? Can you try reducing it by one or two times and replace with a plant-based protein?

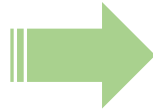
A Guide To Heart Healthy Eating – Step 2

Read Food Labels to Choose Healthy Options

1 READ FOOD LABELS TO CHOOSE HEALTHY OPTIONS

Nutrition labels on food products might seem complicated, but with a little know-how, they can guide healthy food choices.

Look for these five items on the *Nutrition Facts* table to help determine if it is heart-healthy:



1. Serving size
2. Saturated fat
3. Sodium

4. Fibre
5. Sugar

The **servicing size** tells you the amount of food being referred to on the label. This is different from the **% Daily Value (DV)** that tells you if there is **a little** (5% or less) or **a lot** (15%) of a nutrient in a serving.

It is important to consider what portion you will be eating compared to the serving size. For example, if the serving size is 1 Tbsp. but you eat 2, you will need to double the label information.

Use the % Daily Value to choose healthier foods:

- **Fibre** → look for foods with a high % Daily Value (15% or more)
- **Saturated fat + sodium + sugar** → choose foods with a low % Daily Value (5% or less).

If the label doesn't list a % Daily Value for sugar, determine if the sugar is "free (added) sugar" or naturally present.

- Naturally present sugars found in whole foods like fruit, milk products, vegetables, and grains are not a concern.
- Free sugars include sugars added to food as well as sugars in honey, syrups, and fruit juices. Look in the ingredient list for words that end in '-ose', honey, or fruit juice concentrate.

TIP!

Look in your pantry and practice reading food labels for fibre, fat and sugar using crackers, cereal, or bread. If you find items that are high in sugar/fat or low in fibre, look for a replacement during your next trip to the grocery store.

2 LIMIT PROCESSED FOODS – ‘CUT BACK NOT CUT OUT’

Eating heart healthy does NOT mean you can't ever have certain foods you might enjoy – restricting food items may make sticking to healthy diet changes long-term less likely. Use the **motto “cut back, not cut out”** and use the balanced plate to eat whole foods most often.

Some “processed” foods, such as whole grain bread, canned tomatoes, or yogurt are in fact healthy. Highly-processed foods such as commercial cookies/pastries, processed/deli meats, pre-packaged meals, and sugar-sweetened beverages provide limited nutrition and/or contain excess sodium, saturated fat or salt.

Processed foods are most often used for convenience or pleasure and avoiding them completely isn't necessary. But, eating them too often or in large quantities can negatively impact your heart health and increase your risk for other chronic diseases.

Can you try one or more of these **“Cut back, not cut out”** goals:

- **Limit frequency and portion size** – Consider how often and how much you currently choose processed foods and try to slowly reduce the number of times in a week you choose those foods and/or the amount that you eat.
- **Make substitutions** – Note where you most often use processed foods and make healthy swaps to items over time.
- **Cook more often** – When cooking at home, you have more control over ingredients used. Batch cooking and storing leftovers in the freezer makes unprocessed, homemade options convenient for later use.

A Guide to Heart Healthy Eating – Step 3

Find Enjoyment in Cooking and Food

1 COOK MORE OFTEN BY PLANNING AHEAD

Meals don't have to be fancy to be healthy. Use the balanced plate and consider ways you can fill the plate with foods you have on hand in your pantry, fridge or freezer.

Cooking at home allows you to have more control over your food choices and reduces your intake of processed food. Meal planning can help reduce the stress of cooking and keep you from eating out. Meal planning is a skill. It takes time to master, but with practice it becomes easier. Use these tips to help in your meal planning.

TIP!

Use one or two of the tips below to get started. Once you get the hang of it, try adding more. If one is not working for you, that's ok, try a different option.

Assess your week	Plan 15-minute meals or prep ahead of time for evenings you have limited time to cook.
Cook once and use twice	Leftovers are a great way to save time. Simply reheat foods or re-use items from one meal in another dish (e.g. stir-fry vegetables can be used in fajitas).
Batch cook	Make large portions and stock your freezer with items like spaghetti sauces, pre-cooked rice, etc. Picking the right day to do this is key, assess your week.
Multi-task	Prepare lunches or snacks for the next day or chop vegetables for later in the week while dinner cooks.
Create master lists	Keep an ongoing list of your recipe and meal ideas to reference.
Use shortcuts	Use pre-chopped or frozen vegetables to save time preparing meals.
Stock-up on staples	Keep fridge, freezer, and pantry staples on hand to create quick meals when you don't have a plan.

HEART HEALTHY WAYS TO ADD FLAVOUR TO MEALS

Adding flavour to heart-healthy food options makes them more enjoyable. Cooking at home allows you to control the amount of salt, fat, and sugar you use compared to eating out or buying pre-packaged foods.

One way to add flavour to foods is using heart-healthy fats. These fats come from plant-based oils/spreads (e.g. olive oil, canola oil, avocado oil), nuts, seeds (whole and nut/seed butters), avocados, olives, and fatty fish.

- Add olive oil to vegetables and roast them in the oven or grill.
- Make your own salad dressings with liquid oils.
- Top pancakes, French toast or waffles with peanut butter.
- Sprinkle ground flaxseed into your yogurt, smoothies, or cereal.
- Top salads with nuts, seeds or canned salmon or tuna.
- Add chopped olives to your pizza, salad, or sandwich.
- Use avocado in sandwiches in place of butter.

Other healthy ways to flavour foods:

- Use vinegar to add flavour to vegetables, tenderize meat, and make tasty sauces.
- Use salt-free or reduced salt stock for added flavour to items like whole grains and sautéed vegetables.
- Sweeten yogurt or oatmeal with mashed or dried fruit.
- Mix different vegetables for added texture and flavour in meals.
- Create your own no salt added spice and herb blends such as homemade taco seasoning.

2 EAT MINDFULLY TO FIND ENJOYMENT IN FOOD

The best guide of how much or how often to eat is your internal body cues. The hunger scale is a tool that can be used to determine when the right time to eat is and how much to eat for your body on any given day.

HUNGER SCALE	
1	Ravenous
2	Uncomfortably hungry
3	Regular Hungry
4	A Little Hungry
5	Neutral
6	Neutral
7	Lightly Full
8	Comfortably Full
9	Uncomfortably Full
10	Painfully full

Take some time to think about what different levels on the hunger scale feel like in your body.

Aim to eat when you reach 3-4 on the hunger scale and to stop eating when you reach a 7-8.

If you notice yourself on either end of the scale (e.g., 1-2 or 9-10), take time to reflect on what led you there and use it as a learning experience to change your habits next time.

For example, you might notice that at dinner you are at 2 because you had not eaten since lunch. This led you to eat dinner quickly and beyond comfortable fullness. By adding a snack in the afternoon you could better manage your hunger.

Many people think a heart healthy diet means cutting out all the foods that you enjoy, placing foods into *should* or *shouldn't* eat categories. Denying yourself certain foods will only serve to make you want them more.

When we eat foods that are not satisfying to us, we are more likely to overeat, whereas when we are experiencing pleasure from food, it is easier to stop when we feel comfortably full. If our diet is lacking enjoyment, it's unlikely to last very long. Instead, allow yourself foods that you enjoy and focus on adding in heart healthy foods to shift your dietary patterns over time.