



Chapter 3.
Eating for a
healthy heart

Healthy eating

Chad shares his story

When asked about his new reality after surviving a heart attack, Chad says, “I’ve learnt how to manage my new life and I’ve rolled with it. I had to.” Chad had been relatively active all his life but felt he needed help to improve his diet. “I’ve changed my lifestyle,” he says. Thanks to all the help from the dietitian, “Grocery shopping now takes me two hours,” Chad jokes. He now understands the importance of reading labels and choosing foods with less saturated fat, added sugar and sodium. He says, “My blood pressure and cholesterol levels are spot on for the first time in years.”

What is heart-healthy eating?

The foods you eat affect your health. A healthy diet can help reduce your risk of heart disease by:

- Improving your cholesterol levels
- Reducing your blood pressure
- Managing your body weight
- Controlling your blood sugar

Food plays many roles in our lives and we eat for lots of reasons other than hunger. Listen to your body for the signs of hunger.

This is what a heart-healthy diet looks like. It is an overall balance of whole, natural foods. It has few highly processed, unhealthy foods.

- **Vegetables and fruits** are a good source of antioxidants, vitamins, minerals and fibre. Fill half your plate with vegetables and fruit at each meal and snack.
- **Whole grain foods** have lots of fibre, B-vitamins and minerals. Fill a quarter of your plate with whole grain foods.
- **Protein foods** build and repair tissues. Fill a quarter of your plate with protein foods. Choose plant-based protein foods more often. Protein foods include:
 - Legumes, nuts and seeds
 - Tofu, fortified soy beverage
 - Fish, shellfish, eggs, poultry, lean red meat including wild game
- **Lower fat milk** lower fat yogurts, lower fat kefir, and cheeses lower in fat and sodium.

What changes can you make to start a heart-healthy diet?

Prepare meals at home using fresh, whole foods.

- Combine vegetables and fruits for a great appetizer or salad.
- Choose whole grains like whole wheat, oatmeal, oat bran, bulgur, quinoa, brown or wild rice and hulled barley for at least half of your grain servings each day.
- Add legumes such as lentils, kidney beans, and chickpeas to soups, salads and main dishes.
- Eat fish at least twice a week. Choose fatty fish like salmon, mackerel and herring.
- Add milk or fortified soy beverages to your oatmeal, soups, hot beverages, etc.

Fill half your plate with vegetables and fruits.

- Choose a range of brightly coloured vegetables and fruits every day. Eat them raw, roasted, steamed or stir fried.
- Choose orange and dark green vegetables more often: carrots, butternut squash, sweet potatoes, romaine lettuce, broccoli and kale.
- Try unsweetened frozen or canned fruit in the winter.
- Choose whole fruit over juice, even if the juice is unsweetened.
- Use the plate method to plan out meals. Half your plate for vegetables and fruit, a quarter of your plate for protein foods and a quarter of your plate for whole grains.

Drink water or lower-fat plain milk or milk alternatives if you are thirsty.

- Choose skim, 1% or 2% plain milk and yogurt.
- Avoid pop, sports drinks, ready-to-drink tea and coffee drinks, fruit drinks and juices.

Use less sugar, salt and fat when preparing or cooking meals.

- Rinse canned vegetables and fruit that could have added sugar or salt.
- Replace salt with herbs and spices, ginger, garlic, onion, lemon juice or pepper to flavour foods.
- Use smaller amounts of condiments like ketchup, prepared mustard, light soy sauce, salted herbs and poultry or steak spices.

Choose foods higher in fibre.

- Eat more vegetables.
- Eat fruits with their peels if possible.
- Add a vegetable and/or fruit to every meal and snack.
- Choose whole grain bread, flour, pasta or rice instead of white.
- Add one to two tablespoons of bran, high-fibre cereal, psyllium, chia or ground flaxseed to your favourite cereal.
- Add fibre to your diet slowly to prevent gas, bloating or diarrhea.



Source: Eat Well Plate from Government of Canada, available online at <http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/eating-nutrition/healthy-eating-saine-alimentation/tips-conseils/interactive-tools-outils-interactifs/eat-well-bien-manger-eng.php>

If you do eat out, choose restaurants that serve freshly prepared foods.

- Look for menu items that say steamed, broiled, boiled, grilled, baked, roasted or poached.
- Avoid items that say fried, deep-fried, battered, breaded, pickled or smoked.
- Replace fries with a salad, vegetables or rice for a healthier side dish.
- Ask for gravies, dips and sauces on the side so you can control how much to add.
- Avoid menu items with a cream, cheese or butter sauce.
- Skip the bread and butter.
- Choose fresh fruit or yogurt for dessert.
- Ask for a doggie bag to take leftovers home if you can't finish your meal.

Eat fewer highly processed foods.

Highly processed - or ultra-processed – foods are changed from their original food source and have many added ingredients. Different flavours, preservatives and other chemical ingredients are added in a factory. Highly processed foods also include refined foods which have had important nutrients such as vitamins, minerals and fibre taken out. Highly processed foods are often convenient, packaged foods that are easy to grab or are ready-made. But beware — they are often high in calories (energy), sugar, salt and saturated fat

- Hot dogs, deli meats and fast food burgers
- Chips, crackers
- Cakes, donuts, cookies
- Candies and chocolate bars
- Pop, sports drinks and ready-to-drink tea and coffee drinks
- Ice cream and ice cream bars
- Frozen pizzas, rice or pasta entrees

Understanding fat, sodium, added sugar and alcohol

Oils and fats

A small amount of fat is necessary for health. Fat can help your body absorb vitamins but it is also high in calories. The best way to avoid eating too much fat is to eat a diet full of natural, whole foods and to limit highly processed foods.

The type of fat and where it is found is just as important as the amount you eat. There are three main types of dietary fats:

- **Unsaturated fats** come from plant sources and from fish, and are good for your heart and blood vessels. Unsaturated fats are liquid at room temperature.
- **Saturated fats** are commonly found in processed and fried foods. They can also occur naturally in animal products and some plant-based and vegetable oils. Saturated fat raises bad (LDL) cholesterol which is a risk factor for heart disease.
- **Artificial trans fats** are created when hydrogen is added to liquid oils. They are solid at room temperature. Trans fats are used in processed foods to increase their shelf life, but they increase the risk of heart disease, diabetes and other health problems. On food labels, they may be called “hydrogenated oils.” Artificial trans fats are being phased out of the Canadian food supply and should be completely removed by September 2020.

Plant sterols

Plant sterols are a type of vegetable fat. They lower bad (LDL) cholesterol and reduce your risk of heart disease. Plant sterols are found in:

- **Vegetable oils:** Corn, sesame, safflower, wheat germ
- **Nuts and seeds:** Pistachios, pine nuts, sesame and sunflower seeds
- **Vegetables and fruit:** Carrots and oranges.

Plant sterols are added to some foods, like non-hydrogenated margarine. Talk to your dietitian or doctor about adding sterols to your diet, especially if you take medication to lower your cholesterol.

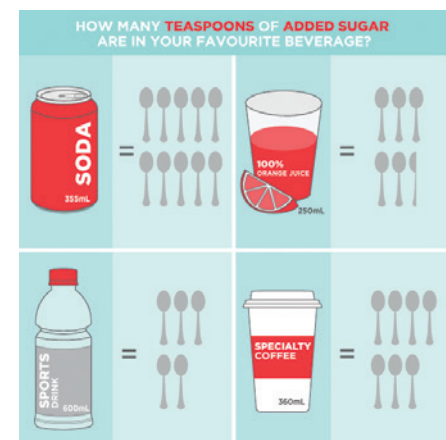
Healthy eating tip	Type of fat	Source
Choose more often	Omega 3-polyunsaturated	<p>Cold-water fish: Salmon, trout, mackerel, sardines, herring</p> <p>Oils: Canola, soy</p> <p>Nuts and seeds: Walnuts, flaxseed (ground), chia seeds</p> <p>Omega-3 eggs</p> <p>Legumes: Soybeans and products, such as tofu</p>
	Monounsaturated	<p>Oils: Olive, canola, peanut</p> <p>Non-hydrogenated margarine from these oils</p> <p>Salad dressings from these oils</p> <p>Nuts and nut butters: Almonds, pecans, hazelnuts, peanuts</p> <p>Avocados</p>
Eat in moderation	Omega 6-polyunsaturated	<p>Oils: Safflower, sunflower, corn</p> <p>Non-hydrogenated margarine from these oils</p> <p>Salad dressings from these oils</p> <p>Nuts, nut butters and seeds: Pine nuts, sunflower seeds</p>
Choose less often	Saturated	<p>Processed meats: Sausages, bologna, salami, hot dogs, liver or meat paté</p> <p>High-fat meats: Lard, regular or medium ground beef, prime rib, lamb, poultry with skin, duck fat, visible fat from meat</p> <p>Full-fat dairy products: Whole milk, high-fat cheese, cream, butter</p> <p>Oils: Coconut, palm, palm kernel oil</p>
Avoid	Trans	<p>Shortening</p> <p>Hard, hydrogenated margarine</p> <p>Commercial baked goods: Donuts, cookies, crackers, croissants, pastries, pies, commercial muffins</p> <p>Products containing partially hydrogenated oils: Fast food, deep fried food</p>

Added sugar

Sugar provides the body with energy. Milk, fruit, vegetables, starches and grains all contain sugar. Added sugars are not listed as part of the Nutrition Facts table. Only total sugars are listed.

Sugars added to food can include:

- White sugar, beet sugar, raw sugar or brown sugar
- Agave syrup, honey, maple syrup, barley malt syrup or fancy molasses



- Fructose, glucose, glucose-fructose (also known as high fructose corn syrup), maltose, sucrose or dextrose
- Fruit juice and purée concentrates that are added to replace sugars in foods

Added sugars are grouped together in the ingredient list. If sugar is near the beginning of the ingredient list, that food will be high in added sugar.

Added sugar gives you energy for a short time, but doesn't help you in any other way. A high-sugar diet is linked to heart disease, stroke, obesity, diabetes, high cholesterol, cancer and cavities in your teeth.

Limit the amount of sugar in your diet:

- Eat whole, natural foods.
- Read food labels to identify and avoid foods with added sugars.
- Drink water instead of sweetened beverages such as pop, chocolate milk, sports drinks, juice, ready-to-drink coffees and teas.

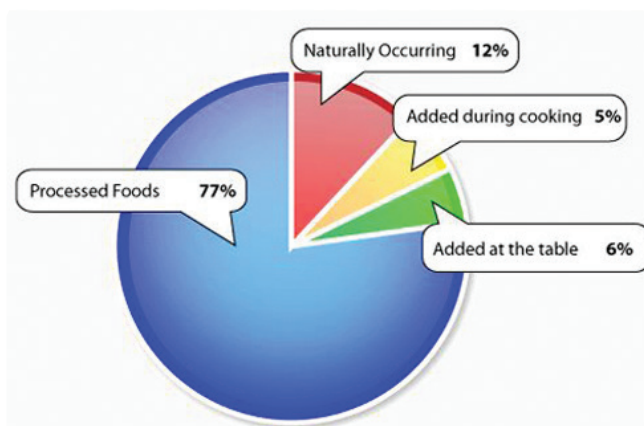
Understand what the sugar claims on packaged foods mean:

- **No added sugar:** The food item doesn't have added sugars such as glucose, fructose, honey or molasses. However, it may contain naturally occurring sugars from fruit and dairy products.
- **Reduced or lower in sugar:** The food item contains at least 25% and at least 5 grams less sugar than the food to which it is compared.
- **Unsweetened:** The food item contains no added sugars and it doesn't contain artificial sweeteners like aspartame or sucralose.
- **Sugar-free or sugarless:** Each standard serving contains less than 0.5 grams of sugar and less than 5 calories per serving.

Added sodium

Your body needs sodium to maintain the balance of water in your body. Salt is the main source of sodium. Other salts, such as sea salt and gourmet salts, all have similar sodium content. Salt is found naturally in shellfish, dairy products, meat and vegetables. In this book, we will use the term "salt" instead of "sodium".

Normally, your kidneys get rid of extra salt in your urine. This keeps your water balance normal. If you regularly have a lot of salt, it can make your body hold extra water. Too much water increases the total amount of blood in your body, which increases blood pressure. A high-salt diet may cause or worsen high blood pressure. Most of the salt found in the typical Canadian diet comes from processed food, **not** the salt shaker.



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“ I loved salt, and all that, and I didn't think I would ever be able to change, but I did.”
— Meldon

Reducing salt in your diet will decrease your risk of high blood pressure. It may take some time, but your taste buds will adjust and you will want less salty food. If you reduce your salt intake to 2,300 mg of sodium per day (one teaspoon of salt), you reduce your risk of heart disease.

People with high blood pressure or heart failure should limit salted foods. If you have any concerns about salt in your diet, talk to your dietitian, doctor or nurse practitioner.

Get more tips to reduce your salt intake at dietitians.ca and UnlockFood.ca

Alcohol

Heavy drinking and binge drinking are risk factors for high blood pressure and stroke. A high alcohol intake can increase your blood pressure, your body weight and your triglyceride levels. Alcohol may also cause problems by interacting with your medications. And many drinks and drink mixes can be high in added sugars too.

If you drink alcohol, limit yourself to small amounts, pace yourself and drink plenty of water at the same time.

“A drink” means:

- 341 mL / 12 oz (1 bottle) of regular strength beer (5% alcohol)
- 142 mL / 5 oz wine (12% alcohol)
- 43 mL / 1½ oz spirits (40% alcohol)

New low-risk drinking guidelines have been released and are being reviewed.

For up-to-date information on alcohol, heart disease and stroke, go to heartandstroke.ca/alcohol.

Adopting a heart-healthy eating pattern

What you eat is important to your health. But how you eat may also be important to your family and social life. Well prepared and colourful food can be a feast for the eyes and your taste buds. Here are some tips to help you with heart-healthy eating.

Eat at the table

- Eat with family members or friends. Make the meal a chance to connect.
- If you are eating alone, think about or plan your day.
- Enjoy your food.
- Turn off the television and the computer.
- Pay attention to the look, smell and taste of your meal.
- Eat slowly and put your fork down between bites.
- Be aware of how much you eat.

Eat often enough

- Eat a meal or snack within an hour or two of waking up.
- Eat at least three times each day. Try to eat every five hours or sooner if possible.
- Do not skip meals: You may be too hungry by your next meal and eat too much.
- Plan healthy snacks if you get very hungry between meals. You might make unhealthy food choices or eat too quickly when you are very hungry. A healthy snack contains a combination of protein foods or whole grains with vegetables and fruit. It is recommended to have 1-2 servings of vegetables and/or fruit with each snack.

Prepare food at home

- Meals don't have to be fancy; they can be as simple as a peanut butter and banana sandwich on whole grain bread with a glass of milk.
- Cook a little extra so you have food ready for the next day. You can also make more and freeze future meals.
- Cut your vegetables before you put them in the fridge. Also, marinate meats before you freeze them. These tricks save time when you are ready to make a meal.

Shop for heart-healthy eating

- Shop in stores and markets with a good choice of fresh foods.
- Read the Nutrition Facts table on food packages.
- Make a meal plan with a shopping list to avoid impulse buys.
- Shop when you are not hungry.
- Buy mostly vegetables, fruits and whole grains.
- Buy lower-fat dairy and lower-fat cheese (<20% M.F.).
- Buy lean meat and alternatives, such as beans and fish.
- Buy time-saving products, such as bagged and washed salad, ready-to-eat dips, such as hummus or tzatziki, canned legumes and bagged baby carrots.

Other heart-healthy diets and menus

There are many heart-healthy ways of eating. The DASH diet and the Mediterranean diet have been proven to reduce the risk of heart disease. The DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet is high in vegetables and fruits, and milk products. The Mediterranean diet is high in fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and is low in milk products, red meat, processed food and sweets. These diets are good tools to help you understand healthy serving sizes and plan your heart-healthy menu.

Learn more about:

- The DASH diet at heartandstroke.ca/dash
- The Mediterranean diet at icm-mhi.org/en

Find an eating plan that works for you

Finding an eating plan that works for you doesn't have to be complicated. You can simply decide to eat fresh unprocessed foods and cook at home more often. Or you can use the DASH diet or Mediterranean diet to design your menu.

Your eating plan is something that should work for the rest of your life. Diets that limit your food choices do not work long-term. You may not get needed nutrients and could gain weight back that you lost.

Whatever eating plan you pick, the bottom line is to choose a wide range of healthy foods. Eat more vegetables and fruits, whole grains and proteins – especially plant-based proteins such as legumes, nuts and seeds. Explore new recipes and foods from other cultures. Use this meal planning chart to get you started on planning healthy eating. Talk to a dietitian if you have any questions about your diet.

Discover new recipes at heartandstroke.ca/recipes

Meal	Sample menu	My choices
Breakfast	¾ cup oatmeal 1 cup skim milk 1 cup berries 2 tbsp ground flaxseed	
Snack	1 home-baked bran muffin 1 orange	
Lunch	1 cup homemade vegetable soup Salmon sandwich: ½ can (75g) salmon 2 slices whole grain bread 1 tsp mayonnaise lettuce 1 tomato 1 apple	
Snack	1 cup raw vegetables ½ cup hummus	
Dinner	1 cup tofu vegetable stir fry 1 cup brown rice ¾ cup of plain yogurt with added vanilla extract ½ cup berries	

Go to page 17 for help to develop healthy eating habits that stick.

Find a dietitian by contacting your provincial dietitians' association

Worksheet: Food labels

Food labels have important information to help you make healthy choices. The most important information is in the Nutrition Facts table and the ingredient list.

Things to look for on the Nutrition Facts table:

Serving size (at top of table)

Is this the amount you are eating? If not, you need to adjust calories (at the top) and nutrients (listed below) based on how much you eat.

Calories

This describes how much energy you get from the food. This is very important if you are watching your weight.

Fat content

Look at the amount of fat — this gives total fat content including unsaturated, saturated and trans. Aim for zero trans fat as it is unhealthy and should be avoided.

Sodium

Look at the “mg” of sodium and remember the maximum recommended is 2,300 mg per day (less if you are on a low-salt diet). Avoid high-salt foods (more than 15% daily value).

Fibre

Look under carbohydrates. Choose foods with at least 2 grams of fibre per serving.

Sugar

The sugar value listed is for total sugars. Avoid high sugar foods (more than 15% daily value).

Potassium, calcium and iron

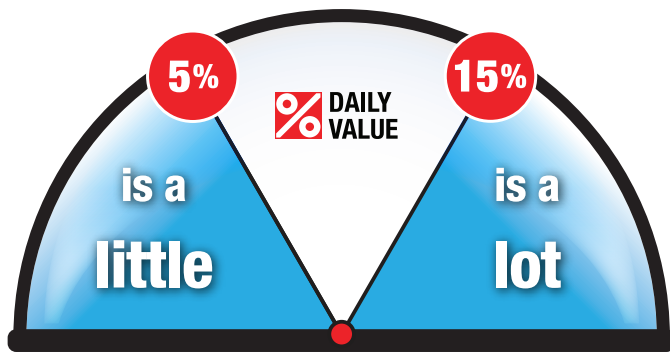
Choose foods that provide these vitamins and minerals.

Nutrition Facts	
Valeur nutritive	
Per 1 cup (250 mL) pour 1 tasse (250 mL)	
Calories 110	% Daily Value*
	% valeur quotidienne*
Fat / Lipides 0 g	0 %
Saturated / saturés 0 g	0 %
+ Trans / trans 0 g	
Carbohydrate / Glucides 26 g	
Fibre / Fibres 0 g	0 %
Sugars / Sucres 22 g	22 %
Protein / Protéines 2 g	
Cholesterol / Cholestérol 0 mg	
Sodium 0 mg	0 %
Potassium 450 mg	10 %
Calcium 30 mg	2 %
Iron / Fer 0 mg	0 %
*5% or less is a little , 15% or more is a lot	
*5% ou moins c'est peu , 15% ou plus c'est beaucoup	

Source: Canadian Food Inspection Agency

% Daily Value (DV)

The “% daily value” tells you if the food has a little (5% or less) or a lot (15% or more) of a certain nutrient: This applies to all nutrients.



The percent daily value (% DV) found in a Nutrition Facts table can help you make informed food choices..

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Ingredients

Each food label has an ingredient list. It lists the order of ingredients from largest to smallest quantity. Here are some tips for understanding the ingredient list:

Unsaturated fats: oils (soybean, corn, safflower, canola, olive, sesame, flaxseed), nuts (peanuts, cashews, almonds, pecans, walnuts) and non-hydrogenated margarine.

Saturated fats: fat, lard, butter, oils (palm, coconut, palm kernel), monoglycerides, diglycerides or tallow.

Trans fats: hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated vegetable oil, hard margarine or shortening.

Added sugar: sugar, honey, molasses, anything that ends in “ose” (dextrose, sucrose, fructose, maltose, lactose) or syrups. Added sugars are grouped together on the ingredient list.

Added salt: sodium, sodium chloride, sodium bicarbonate or baking soda, baking powder, monosodium glutamate (MSG), sodium/disodium/monosodium phosphate, brine, sea salt, soy sauce or spices.

Learn about the Nutrition Facts table at hc-sc.gc.ca

Worksheet: My healthy eating

How I eat now

Do I... (check off all that apply)

- Eat foods that are high in salt or add salt to my food?
- Eat highly processed snack foods such as donuts, cookies, chips and crackers?
- Eat highly processed meats such as hot dogs, burgers, sausages and deli meats?
- Eat fried foods such as French fries, onion rings and chicken nuggets?
- Eat frozen dinners such as pizza and meat pies?
- Drink sugary drinks such as pop, fruit drinks, 100% fruit juices, sports drinks or specialty coffees and/or teas?
- Skip meals?
- Eat while watching TV?
- Eat when I do not feel hungry?

What changes can I make to eat healthier? Am I eating foods from all four food groups?

Group	What I eat now	How I can improve
Vegetables and fruits		
Whole grain foods		
Protein foods (especially plant-based proteins: beans and lentils, nuts and seeds, lean meats, poultry and fish, lower-fat milk, yogurt, cheeses)		





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