

Diet for Heart Bypass Patient

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While all adults should practice heart-healthy diet practices, nutrition is especially important for people who have had coronary artery bypass surgery. For these patients, restricting cholesterol and sodium intake is more than a passing recommendation - it could literally save their lives. Diet recommendations for heart patients are built on the same principles that should guide everyone's choices, but emphasizes low calorie, low cholesterol and low sodium intake.

The Importance of a Heart Healthy Diet

According to the American Heart Association, over 448,000 Americans had coronary artery bypass surgery last year. The reason most people have bypass surgery is to replace coronary arteries that have become clogged with calcified plaque that has developed as a result of years of high cholesterol intake, cigarette smoking, diabetes or other risk factors for heart disease. Bypass surgery has a very high success rate, with the artery grafts lasting 10 to 15 years. But, it is not a miracle cure. After surgery, patients are instructed to follow a heart-healthy diet that emphasizes low cholesterol, sodium and fat intake to avoid having the bypass grafts close prematurely.

Specific Diet Recommendations

A heart-healthy diet is made up of a wide variety of nutrient-dense [foods](#) from six different food groups: grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, meats & bean and oils. For the average healthy adult male consuming 2,000 calories a day, this includes six to eight daily servings of grains, four to five daily servings of vegetables, four to five daily servings of fruits, two to three daily servings of fat-free or low fat products, fewer than six ounces of lean meat, poultry or seafood per day, two to three daily servings of fats and oils and four to five servings of nuts, seeds or legumes per week.

The Cleveland Clinic recommends that bypass patients restrict their diet to less than 7% of total daily calories from saturated fat, less than one percent from trans fats and limit their cholesterol intake to less than 300 mg per day. In addition, bypass patients should eat fish twice a week, favor whole grain, high fiber foods over processed foods, eat more fruits and vegetables, limit sodium intake to less than 1500 mg per day and avoid [foods and beverages](#) that contain added sugar.

Bypass patients should also avoid fad diets, like Atkins or South Beach, that replace carbohydrates with high intakes of protein. These diets typically replace starches, fruits and vegetables with high-fat meats, eggs and other dairy products that can raise cholesterol levels.

Adjusting to Real Life

Adapting to a new diet can be challenging at first, but it doesn't have to be. Bypass patients should start by following the general dietary guidelines outlined above, limiting total calories, cholesterol, fat and sodium intake. After a few weeks, they should look for additional ways to replace calorie-dense foods with healthier alternatives. When dining out or at friends' homes, it's important to take control by asking for healthier substitutions like non-fat yogurt instead of butter and sour cream on baked potatoes. When ordering in restaurants, it's a good idea to ask for the condiments on the side instead of having them added by the kitchen.

Finally, don't forget about [exercise](#). Adding 20 to 30 minutes of daily aerobic exercise can help expend calories, elevate high density lipoproteins (the good type of cholesterol) and maintain higher metabolic rates through the day. Diet

and exercise go hand in hand for healthy living.

Resources

- [Estimating Serving Sizes](#)