

Healthy Eating Plan to Prevent Plaque in the Arteries

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, heart disease is the leading killer of American men and women. In 2008, over one million people were diagnosed with heart disease. The most common type of heart disease is coronary artery disease, which is a form of atherosclerosis. Atherosclerosis is the gradual narrowing of the arteries due to the build up of calcified plaque from cholesterol. The good news is that even those at high risk for heart disease can significantly reduce their chances of getting the disease by eating a heart healthy diet and following their doctors' advice.

Learning to Make Healthy Choices

Atherosclerosis begins early in life--as early as one's 20s. Depending on diet and lifestyle, it can progress very slowly or very rapidly. The principal offender is cholesterol and saturated fat in the diet. Diets high in fat and processed [foods](#) contribute to the amount of cholesterol in the blood that eventually leads to the accumulation of plaque in the arteries.

If you've been told that you need to make changes in your diet to help prevent atherosclerosis, don't be discouraged. It's easier than you think. Begin by replacing calorie-dense cakes and desserts with fruits and vegetables. Switch from foods made from white, processed flour to foods made with whole grains like oats, whole wheat and whole grain corn. Swap the baked potatoes with sour cream and butter for brown or wild rice spiced up with low-sodium soy sauce. Make the easy changes first, then move on to the more difficult.

For breakfast, instead of bacon and eggs, have a bowl of heart healthy, whole grain flakes with fat-free or low-fat milk. At lunch, drive past the high fat burger at Burger King and have a healthier, low-fat six-inch turkey club sandwich at Subway. For dinner, instead of high fat meats that are fried or baked, grill a chicken breast or salmon fillet. Vegetables are also great when grilled along side your main course.

Becoming an Educated Consumer

To make positive changes in your [health](#) and prevent the build-up of plaque in your arteries, you need to become an educated consumer. One of the simplest things you can do is learn how to read packaging labels on boxes of food you buy at the supermarket.

All packaged food is required by [law](#) to display information about the product on its label. What's important to those who want to prevent heart disease are the number of servings per container, calories, percent and type of fat, as well as the number of grams of carbohydrate, fat and protein. Some labels will even break the grams of fat down into amount of saturated, polyunsaturated and trans fat. The goal is to find foods you enjoy that are low in saturated fat. Many supermarkets even provide nutrition information beside the foods that aren't packaged, like in the produce section.

The American Heart Association recommends that adults eat less than 300 mg of cholesterol a day. One large egg contains over 213 mg of cholesterol, so a two-egg omelet will exceed your entire daily allotment for the day. Instead of choosing high cholesterol foods like egg yolks, try an omelet made with just the egg whites.

Other foods to avoid are those that are high in trans fats. Trans fats are fats that have been modified to increase their shelf life in food to make them more appealing and last longer. The downside is that eating a diet rich in trans fats can elevate your risk for coronary artery disease. Instead of eating foods loaded with trans fats, replace them with those that are high in polyunsaturated fat. By reading the label on the packages, you'll learn to make informed choices

regarding what you eat.

Certain types of fish, like salmon, trout, sardines and anchovies are high in omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3 fatty acids can help to lower the risk for heart disease by reducing the amount of bad cholesterol in the blood. You can also find omega-3 fatty acid in plant sources like walnuts, flaxseed, soybean oil and canola oil.

Sources of Additional Help

Undertaking a heart healthy diet may seem like an impossible task after a lifetime of eating fast food. But there is help available. Some of the best resources are provided in the links below--the American Heart Association, the American Dietetic Association and the USDA. There's also great information about how to prevent the build-up of plaque at the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

Resources

- [American Heart Association](#)
- [National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute](#)
- [American Dietetic Association](#)