

Diets have been in the news quite a bit lately. The key to good health is, after all, a well-balanced and sensible meal plan. A proper diet not only nourishes the body, but also provides benefits for cardiac, muscle, and bone health. We are privileged to have Judy Matusky outline a good dietary plan. The following article discusses different food groups and offers a recipe. Eating well can actually be enjoyable!

— Beverly Vaughn, MD, Medical Coordinator,
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Proper nutrition is a critical component of women's cardiac health. The risk of heart disease in women is as great as that in men. Lowering total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, and triglycerides, while increasing HDL cholesterol, is the first step to improving heart health. A healthful eating plan, combined with regular physical activity, is an important contribution to a healthier heart. Current research suggests that a “Mediterranean” style of eating can result in big changes in these cholesterol numbers. The Mediterranean meal plan is modeled after the dietary habits of Mediterranean countries, such as Greece and southern Italy. Diets rich in monounsaturated fats, fish, nuts, legumes, low-fat dairy products, fruit, and vegetables can lower the incidence of heart disease.

Eat the Rainbow

Shop regularly for a wide variety of colorful fresh fruits and vegetables. Be sure to include dark leafy greens, such as spinach and swiss chard, and orange vegetables, including carrots and sweet potatoes. The greater the variety of colors, the greater the variety of heart-protective plant

compounds called phytochemicals. Your goal is to eat 2 ½ cups of vegetables and 2 cups of fruit daily. For visual reference, the size of a baseball is equal to 1 cup.

Mediterranean Food Guide Pyramid

Fish for Omega-3s

Spend time at the fish counter and experiment with the different fish and seafood available in most supermarkets. Aim to consume a 4-6 ounce portion of fish at least 2-3 times per week. The omega-3 fatty acids found in fish are important for heart health. Fishes that are higher in omega-3 fatty acids are salmon (wild or farm raised), anchovies, sardines, bluefin tuna, sea bass, rainbow trout, mussels, oysters, flounder, and halibut. But you don't have to limit yourself to these varieties, as all fish and seafood (including canned tuna) contain omega-3 fatty acids. Shellfish is very low in saturated fat and is fine to include in your diet. If you don't like fish, try to eat a handful of walnuts and a few tablespoons of ground flax seeds several times a week. Both are good sources of omega-3 fatty acids.

Bountiful Beans

Beans are an excellent source of heart protective nutrients, including folic acid, magnesium, and calcium, as well as plant proteins and fiber. The fiber in beans is a soluble fiber which helps lower cholesterol levels and improve blood sugar. Try to eat one 3 cups of beans per week. Be adventurous and try adzuki, black, great northern, and pinto beans, or the more familiar chickpeas, lima, and kidney beans.

Face the Fats

Your goal is to eliminate as much saturated and trans fatty acids in your diet as possible. Use monounsaturated olive oil and canola oil for cooking and baking. Read food labels;

This is intended as an information resource providing guidelines for women. As always, check with your own healthcare practitioner with your specific concerns and questions.

avoid products with partially hydrogenated oils. These fats contain cholesterol-raising trans fatty acids. Try to limit saturated fat to less than 7% of your total calories per day.

Nibble on Nuts

Studies have reported that adding nuts to a heart-healthy diet may reduce the risk of heart disease by 30 to 50 percent. Although nuts are high in fat, the fat is unsaturated. Calories can add up, so limit your serving size to a handful several times per week.

Enjoy Soy

Although soybeans are not typically included in a traditional Mediterranean diet, soybeans are an excellent substitute for animal protein. They are high in protein, low in saturated fat and are cholesterol free. Soybeans can be found in a variety of different products. The next time you visit your supermarket, look for soy nuts, soy nut butter, soy cheese, soy milk, soy veggie burgers and fresh green soybeans called edamame.

Hearty Whole Grains

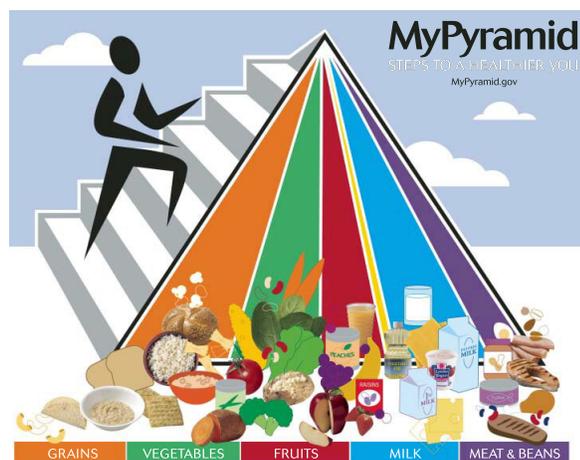
The refining of whole grains removes a significant amount of vital nutrients, fiber, and phytochemicals. Therefore, carbohydrate sources should be whole grain whenever possible. Choose brown rice, wheat berries, whole-wheat pasta, quinoa, oatmeal, and barley. Select 100% whole grain bread and be sure your breakfast cereal has at least 3 grams of fiber per serving. Eat 4-7 ounces of grains per day and make half of those servings whole grain. Remember that a serving size is smaller than you might think. A one ounce serving is equal to a ½ cup of cooked rice, pasta or oatmeal, ⅓ of a large bagel and about 1 cup of cold cereal.

Other Helpful Points

- If weight loss is your goal, this eating plan is an excellent tool for dropping unwanted pounds. Just be sure to keep an eye on portion sizes.
- When food shopping, spend most of your time around the perimeter of the store. That's where you will find the freshest and least processed foods.
- Don't expect to change your diet overnight. Take it one step at a time and have fun experimenting with new recipes and new products.

For more nutrition tips, visit www.mypyramid.gov.

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Strawberry Smoothie

- 1 ripe banana
- 2 cups frozen strawberries
- 2 cups low-fat vanilla yogurt

Blend the banana, strawberries and yogurt in blender until smooth. Makes 3-4 servings.

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This article is part of our Menopause and You library, a web-based program sponsored by Women's Health Source. To view the entire library of articles, visit www.mainlinehealth.org/whs and click on the "Menopause and You" link. To speak with our nurse counselor, call 1-888-876-8764 or email whs@mlhs.org.

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