

Heart TALK

Heart-healthy and Stroke-free Living with Dr. Amy L. Doneen, DNP, ARNP

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Thoughts from Dr. Amy



Eat Smart Tips



Optimize Your Heart and Brain Health

The American Heart Association has designated November as Eat Smart Month, to inspire and motivate Americans to adopt a healthier lifestyle for the holiday season and beyond. Using the slogan, “Let’s nourish our hearts and minds together,” the AHA’s Healthy for Good initiative encourages all of us to “make healthy, delicious choices every time you eat.”

What are the best ways to optimize your diet? Here’s a look at seven science-backed nutritional strategies to support and enhance the wellness of the more than 60,000 blood vessels in your body — plus BaleDoneen recommendations for the best overall eating plan to help reduce your heart attack and stroke risk.

FILL HALF YOUR PLATE WITH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Consuming more of these nutritional powerhouses could add years to your life! Two Harvard studies of nearly 110,000 men and women found that people who ate eight or more servings of fruits and veggies daily were 30 percent less likely to suffer a heart attack or stroke than those who ate less than 1.5 servings. Another recent study of nearly 400,000 men and women found those

whose diet was highest in fiber (found in most fruits and vegetables) had a nearly 60 percent risk of dying from cardiovascular disease, infectious disease, or respiratory disorders. One easy way to get a full spectrum of health benefits is to “eat the rainbow,” by including a variety of colorful fruits and veggies in your daily diet.

GO RED FOR YOUR HEART AND ARTERIAL HEALTH

Lycopene is the pigment that gives some fruits, such as tomatoes, their ruby hue. Several studies suggest that tomatoes, which are also high in disease-fighting antioxidants, vitamins A and C, folic acid, and beta carotene, have surprisingly powerful benefits for vascular health, including reducing levels of oxidized LDL cholesterol (the kind that can form plaque in the coronary arteries) in both

healthy people and those with type 2 diabetes. Eating tomatoes or tomato products is also linked to reductions in blood pressure and inflammation. A large study linked high consumption of lycopene from tomatoes with a 65 percent decrease in stroke risk.

DITCH SWEET DRINKS

Consuming just one or two sugar-sweetened beverages daily – such as energy drinks, fruit drinks, soda, or coffee drinks – raises risk for a heart attack or dying from CVD by 35 percent, diabetes risk by 26 percent, and stroke risk by 16 percent, according to a [2015 Harvard study](#). Sweet drinks have been called “liquid candy” and rank as the top source of added sugar in the U.S. diet. Instead, quench your thirst with one of [our refreshing fruit and herb](#)

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A diet that is high in fruit and vegetables is one of the best — and most delicious — ways to protect your arterial and overall health. Eating a plant-based diet has been linked to lower risk for heart attacks, strokes, high blood pressure, eye and digestive problems and several forms of cancer. What’s more, vegetables have been called a dieter’s best friend, since they are low in calories but high in fiber, helping you feel full. Fruits and vegetables are also rich in a wide range of other important nutrients, including vitamins A and C, potassium and folate.

And on a cold winter day, making soup is an easy way to warm up your kitchen, using what you already have in your pantry and fridge. Here’s how to build your own veggie soup adventure, with an easy recipe that has dozens of possible variations. Try out different combinations and see which ones your family likes best. Soup almost always tastes even better on the second day, so this is the perfect recipe to double to make two or more meals. Chef tip: When selecting vegetables and herbs, keep their flavors in mind so they harmonize. For example, corn, beans, tomatoes and peppers are a classic Southwestern combination that pairs well with chili powder and cilantro. When adding dried spices, use a small amount, such as half a teaspoon at a time, and taste as you go to avoid seasoning overload.

PREPARATION

Trim and chop or slice vegetables into bite-sized pieces. Dice aromatics. Heat the oil in a large pot over medium heat. Sauté the aromatics until fragrant and softened (about 5 minutes). Add chopped vegetables and cook over medium heat until they are lightly browned and starting to soften. Add spices and cook one additional minute. Add liquid and bring to simmer. Reduce heat to low and cover the pot. Simmer until all of the vegetables are tender (about 45-60 minutes). Taste soup and adjust seasonings if necessary. If desired, puree with an immersion blender. Remove from heat and transfer into serving bowls. Add garnish of your choice — and enjoy! Adapted from thekitchn.com and splendidtable.org.

INGREDIENTS

- Aromatics, such as 3 cloves of garlic and/or 1 cup of chopped shallots, onion or leeks.
- 1-2 pounds of vegetables, such as cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, endive, kale, green beans, peas, peppers, spinach, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, zucchini, etc.
- 2 tablespoons of oil, such as extra virgin olive oil, avocado oil, coconut oil or walnut oil
- Seasonings of your choice, such as bay leaves, oregano, cumin, chili powder, curry powder, paprika, or freshly ground pepper.
- 6 cups of liquid, such as low-sodium broth, tomato juice or water. You can also adjust the flavor by adding a little lemon juice, red or white wine, vinegar or hot sauce. If the soup is too thick, add more liquid as needed.
- Garnishes, such as freshly chopped parsley or other herbs, a dollop of yogurt, toasted pine nuts, or a sprinkling of Parmesan cheese.



What's the Best Diet to Keep Your Arteries Healthy?

Rather than advise a one-size-fits-all diet based on the average results from large studies, the BaleDoneen Method recommends a diet based on your DNA. We use genetic tests to identify the optimal eating plan for each patient. Ask your healthcare provider for more info on the two inexpensive genetic tests discussed below. Using them to guide your dietary choices can help you lower your risk for heart attacks, strokes and diabetes:

APO E GENOTYPE. This test analyzes your Apolipoprotein E (Apo E) genotype, which influences both your lifetime risk for heart disease and the best diet to avoid it. The results can be used to determine the optimal amount of fat in your diet and whether you should limit or avoid alcohol. A diet based on your Apo E genotype fights the leading risk for heart attack and a major risk for stroke: abnormal lipid levels. Studies show that eating the right foods for your Apo E genotype raises levels of HDL (good) cholesterol and lower levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol and triglycerides.

HAPTOGLOBIN GENOTYPE. If you have type 2 diabetes, this test can reveal if you have a genotype that quintuples risk for heart disease — and guide precision-medicine treatments to almost eliminate this risk, a peer-reviewed recent BaleDoneen study reported. If you are not diabetic, you can learn if you have a genotype linked to increased risk for intestinal, autoimmune and inflammatory disorders and if you'd benefit from a gluten-free diet and probiotics.

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[infused water recipes](#), or squeeze a spritz of lemon or lime into plain or sparkling water. In a [six-year study](#) of more than 20,000 people, those who drank five or more glasses of H₂O daily had half the risk of developing fatal heart disease than those who swigged two or fewer glasses a day, even when other risk factors were taken into account.

NIBBLE ON DARK CHOCOLATE

Amazing, but true: Eating dark chocolate could save your life! A study of more than 19,000 people, published in [European Heart Journal](#), found that those who ate an average of 7.5 grams of chocolate daily (one small square) had lower blood pressure and were 39 percent less likely to suffer a heart attack or stroke than those who averaged 1.7 grams or less daily. An even bigger study found eating small amounts of chocolate trimmed diabetes risk by 31 percent. Based on these and other recent studies, we actually “prescribe” 7.5 grams of chocolate daily to our patients to enhance heart and arterial health.

SPICE IT UP!

Herbs and spices have been used as food and medicine for thousands of years. Modern science has shown that some of these tasty flavorings really do have remarkable health benefits, particularly for boosting cardiovascular (CV) wellness. Two very large studies recently linked a spicy diet to longer life and lower risk of death from heart-related causes. As [we recently reported](#), seasonings with proven cardiovascular perks include cinnamon, which reduces cholesterol and blood sugar; turmeric, which fights inflammation, gum disease and depression; and hot chili peppers, which have been linked to longer life and lower risk for heart attacks and strokes.

FOR A FLATTER BELLY AND HEALTHIER HEART, TRIM 300 CALORIES A DAY FROM YOUR DIET.

A [recent study](#) found that people who cut 300 calories a day from their diet — the equivalent of two chocolate chip cookies or a slice of pizza — not only lost an average of 16 pounds over a two-year

period but also had significant improvements in their cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar and other markers of heart and metabolic health. What's more, study participants who practiced calorie restriction also lowered their levels of an inflammatory marker that has been linked to increased risk for cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline and cancer.

NOSH ON NUTS (IN MODERATION).

People who eat nuts regularly have a lower risk for developing heart disease or experiencing cardiovascular events, such as heart attacks and strokes, compared to those who rarely or never eat nuts, according to [a study of more than 210,000 men and women](#). Although the tasty treats are high in calories, they can also help people avoid long-term weight gain or obesity, [other research shows](#). Eating almonds or hazelnuts may raise HDL “good” cholesterol, while pistachios help lower triglycerides. The BaleDoneen Method recommends eating a palmful of nuts daily, preferably tree nuts with skins, such as almonds, walnuts, hazelnuts and pistachios.



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