



## Lady of America Newsletter – February 2010 – The Love Issue

### Eating: Feed Your Heart Well With Heart-Healthy Foods

Medicine has made great strides in preventing and reversing heart disease — heart attacks and strokes are said to easily be prevented; doctors now have non-invasive tests that can identify at-risk patients; and by making lifestyle adjustments and using new medications, you can stop and even reverse damage to the heart's arteries without going under the knife.

According to the American Heart Association, heart disease is the #1 killer of women. There are a lot of lifestyle factors that can help your doctor identify if you are at risk, including your age, whether or not you smoke, medical conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure, your calcium score, HDL and LDL levels, triglyceride levels, family history, waist size and your diet, for starters.

According to Dr. Arthur Agatston, a Miami-based cardiologist and founder of The South Beach Diet, the bigger the waist — more than 35 inches — and the more belly fat, the more important it is to get rid of it through diet and exercise. The higher your HDL levels (50 mg/dL or more), the lower your LDL levels (less than 130 mg/dL) and the lower your triglyceride levels (lower than 150 mg/dL) the less cardiac risk you have.

To fight cardiovascular disease or prevent it requires good nutrition and exercise that not only improves your cardiovascular system but builds and strengthens muscles and burns fat. Eating foods that allow you to lose or maintain a healthy weight, improve your numbers and lower blood pressure will help keep you heart healthy.

Today there are a lot of diets and programs that follow the principle of limiting unhealthy fats, including good fats and nutrient-rich foods that help cut the risk of heart disease. If you are looking for such a diet, consider The South Beach Diet, Mediterranean Diet, The Flat Belly Diet, Weight Watchers and the GI Diet. All these programs have healthy eating principles that promote eating nutrient-dense, fiber-rich foods, lean protein and low-fat dairy.

“When you consistently eat the right carbohydrates (nutrient-dense, fiber-rich vegetables, whole fruits and whole grains), lean protein, low-fat dairy and the right fats, you give your body the nutrients it needs to regulate blood pressure, fight cell-damaging inflammation, establish normal cholesterol and triglyceride levels and reduce the risk of potentially deadly blood clots,” Dr. Agatston says in his book, *The South Beach Heart Health Revolution*. “These principles are based on the way we were designed to eat,” he continued.



The American Heart Association and the Mayo Clinic's guidelines mirror Dr. Agatston's principles. To help you start to feed your heart — and your body — well, follow these simple guidelines. We promise they are easy to incorporate into your everyday routine.

1. Know how many calories you need and proper portion size. A heart-healthy diet is about balance, and with balance comes portion.
2. Limit unhealthy fats and add moderate amounts of good fat in your diet daily. Good fats include omega-3 (fish oil), olive oil, canola oil, peanut oil, flaxseed oil, avocado and nuts. According to the Mayo Clinic, limiting how much saturated and trans fat you eat is the most important step you can take to reduce your blood cholesterol and lower your risk of coronary artery disease. A high blood cholesterol level can lead to a build-up of plaque in your arteries, called *atherosclerosis*, which can increase your risk of heart attack and stroke. The best way to reduce saturated and trans fats in your diet is to limit (or eliminate) the amount of solid fats — butter, margarine and shortening — you add to food when cooking and serving. Use low-fat substitutions when possible for a heart-healthy diet.
3. Eat good carbs, including whole grains (oats, brown rice, whole wheat or whole grain breads, whole wheat pasta), fruits and vegetables.
4. Eat lean protein, including fish, poultry, meat and low-fat dairy. Also in this category are nuts, but remember they are high in calories, so watch the serving size. Legumes — beans, peas and lentils — also are good sources of protein and contain less fat and no cholesterol, making them good substitutes for meat. Substituting soy protein for animal protein will reduce fat and cholesterol intake.
5. Add more antioxidant foods to your diet. Research suggests that adding antioxidants found in fruits, vegetables and grains to your diet is well worth it. Antioxidants may help stave off heart disease, diabetes and stroke. Some studies indicate that antioxidants may even delay the onset of many age-related diseases. Be sure to include berries, kiwis, plums, oranges, red grapes, cherries, grapefruit, kale, spinach, yellow squash, brussel sprouts, broccoli, eggplant, red bell peppers, sweet potatoes, barley, rye and oats. Choose whole fruit over juice and add green tea (at least 2 cups every day). Tea contains *catechins*, which are antioxidants. Research shows that green tea has the highest amount of catechins. One study showed that steeping either green or black tea for 5 minutes released more than 80% of its catechins.
6. Reduce the salt in your food. Salt contributes to high blood pressure, a risk factor for cardiovascular disease. The American Heart Association recommends that healthy adults eat less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium a day (about a teaspoon). Keep in mind that processed food (canned, packaged and frozen) contain a lot of salt. Look for “reduced-sodium” condiments and soups. Eating fresh foods and making your own soups and meals will dramatically help you reduce the sodium.
7. Plan ahead by finding heart-healthy and tasty recipes and meals.

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