

Diet's Role in Heart Disease



By Deborah Jeanne Sergeant

Your fork can influence your risk of heart disease. While genetics also affect your chances, diet represents one factor you can control.

Here's what some area experts recommend:

From **Seth B. Zembrak**, lead physician assistant for UR Medicine Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit at Strong Memorial Hospital:

- "Eat a common-sense diet with low cholesterol and high in fiber.
- "It's not just learning about what foods are better, but learning about the types of fat and how they interact.
- "Eat things in moderation. If you tell people 'Steak is bad,' they can't follow that and they'll fall off the wagon.
- "Don't forget the physical activity guidelines. But remember, too, that there's a genetic component. Many patients that are very physically fit may need surgery clearance for taking care of an injury. They fail the stress test because of the genetic component."

From **Illuminada Vilca**, nutrition educator, Finger Lakes Eat Smart NY, a program of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Monroe County:

- "To avoid saturated fat, remember that anything coming from an animal has saturated fat. You need to watch your intake.

- "With chicken, get the breast without skin.

- "Certain cuts of red meat are leaner. For hamburger, look for 90 or 93 percent lean meat. It will have more protein and less fat than 80 to 83 percent lean meat.

- "How you prepare food also makes a difference, as you can drain off the fat, bake, broil or steam instead of fry or cook in oil.

- "Remember, since everything coming from an animal has saturated fat, dairy does, too. Drink 1 to 2-percent milk instead of whole milk. Read the labels on yogurt. Greek yogurt with protein may be the best. Butter has saturated fat. We need to balance everything.

- "The intake of whole grains may help prevent heart disease. We need to have at least half of our servings of grains whole grains. Whole grains improve digestion and help prevent heart disease. Buckwheat, popcorn, brown rice, and bulgur are a few examples. By eating produce and whole grains, you help prevent heart disease and Type 2 diabetes.

- "It's always good to include

fruits and vegetables because of the fiber you can find in them. They will help you feel full, too. Fruits and vegetables have a key role to play to preventing heart disease, too. They also provide vitamins and minerals, which promote good health."

In general, foods with more processing tend to contain fewer nutrients and more sodium, fat and calories.

"Dietary and Policy Priorities for Cardiovascular Disease, Diabetes, and Obesity: A Comprehensive Review," by Dariush Mozaffarian published by the American Heart Association, states: "Evidence-informed dietary priorities include increased fruits, non-starchy vegetables, nuts, legumes, fish, vegetable oils, yogurt, and minimally processed whole grains; and fewer red meats, processed (eg, sodium-preserved) meats, and foods rich in refined grains, starch, added sugars, salt, and trans fat.

"More investigation is needed on the cardiometabolic effects of phenolics, dairy fat, probiotics,



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fermentation, coffee, tea, cocoa, eggs, specific vegetable and tropical oils, vitamin D, individual fatty acids, and diet-microbiome interactions.

"Little evidence to date supports the cardiometabolic relevance of other popular priorities: eg, local, organic, grass-fed, farmed/wild, or non-genetically modified."

For tips on portion and other aspects of healthful eating, visit www.myplate.gov.