

# WELL BALANCED

- FEBRUARY 2026 -

Heart Month



February is Heart Month, a reminder that our daily lifestyle choices, such as what we eat, can make a significant difference in preventing heart disease. While smart food choices can support a sustainable, balanced relationship with food, help maintain a healthy weight, and lower the risk of chronic conditions, staying consistent with healthy eating habits can be challenging for many. Understanding what makes nutrition truly heart healthy can help make choices easier and more sustainable. By focusing on balanced, nutrient-dense foods rather than chasing trends and quick fixes, it's possible to build habits that support long-term heart health and overall well-being.

## Spotting Fad Diets

Because nutrition is deeply personal and change can be challenging, many people looking to support their heart health may seek solutions to lose weight, reduce the need for medications, or simply learn how to eat healthier, but they may not be sure where to start. For these reasons, or others, they may encounter "fad" diets or the latest diet trends. High popularity of a diet does not necessarily mean it's healthy or safe.



### Reminder

Everyday choices matter! In addition to understanding what heart-healthy eating looks like, learning how to make daily choices that support your nutrition goals is just as important. A few ideas to consider include tuning in to your hunger cues, reading food labels, being mindful of portion sizes, and cooking and eating at home more often.

### Watch for these signs of a fad diet:

- **Promises for fast, easy, or guaranteed results for everyone.**  
Health and wellness needs are unique to each individual. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and quick results are often neither realistic nor sustainable.
- **Buzzwords, such as "cleanse" or "detox."**  
These terms suggest special programs are needed to be healthy, but the body already detoxes naturally through the liver. Drinking plenty of water and eating whole foods support this process best.
- **Phrases that sound scientific, such as "proprietary blend" or "superfood recipe."**  
These terms are often used in marketing to make products seem more effective than they really are, without clearly explaining what's in them.
- **Requirements to purchase shakes, supplements, or prepackaged food.**  
Some of these products may support health goals when used safely and advised by a physician or nutrition professional, but many are not FDA approved. Most nutritional needs can be met with whole foods.
- **Instruction to severely restrict calories.**  
Restricting calories can lead to weight loss, but severe restriction is an extreme, unhealthy, and unsustainable approach. Calories are essential energy that fuels the body's needs.
- **Guidance to eliminate entire food groups.**  
While some individuals may need to avoid certain foods for personal or medical reasons, a variety of food groups, such as proteins, carbohydrates, and fats, is generally necessary for balanced nutrition.

- **Claims of achieving health goals without the need to exercise.**

Although it's possible to lose weight and achieve some health goals with a nutrition focus alone, regular physical activity is also essential for a heart-healthy lifestyle.

If a diet, product, or claim sounds too good to be true, it probably is. While some trendy diets might lead to success, the results are typically not long-lasting. Beyond that, fad diets can contribute to an unhealthy relationship with food and could lead to health complications down the road.

## Heart-Healthy Nutrition—The Basics

Eating healthy can feel overwhelming, especially since nutrition is often an emotional experience for many, and the abundance of conflicting information adds another layer of challenge. The American Heart Association recommends eating a variety of foods to help reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, and other chronic illnesses. Taking a balanced approach—enjoying certain foods each day while approaching others more mindfully—can make healthy eating feel more manageable.

### Enjoy Each Day . . .

- Whole fruits and vegetables
- Whole grains (e.g., brown rice, oatmeal, whole-wheat bread)
- Beans and legumes
- Nuts and seeds
- Fish and lean meat (e.g., salmon, chicken, turkey)
- Low-fat and fat-free dairy and dairy alternatives
- Healthy fats (e.g., vegetable oil, olive oil, avocados)

### Consume Mindfully . . .

- Sugar-sweetened beverages
- Sodium and salty foods
- Saturated fats (which are solid at room temperature and are in foods such as butter, coconut oil, beef, and pork)
- Processed red meats
- Refined carbohydrates
- Full-fat dairy products



### Did You Know?

Regular physical activity is an important part of supporting heart health. The CDC recommends aiming for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity each week, or a combination of the two. In addition, adults should include muscle-strengthening activities on two or more days per week. Finding activities you genuinely enjoy is key, and it makes staying active easier and more sustainable over time.

It's important to note that the nutrition information provided here offers general guidance. Everyone's health and nutrition needs are unique. For personalized recommendations, it's best to discuss your health concerns with your health care provider or a qualified nutrition professional.

### Resources

- » American Heart Month ([nhlbi.nih.gov](https://nhlbi.nih.gov))

### Sources

- » <https://odphp.health.gov/myhealthfinder/health-conditions/diabetes/eat-healthy>
- » <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/nutrition-basics/your-guide-to-healthy-eating-habits-that-stick>
- » <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/losing-weight>
- » <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/dont-fall-for-a-fad-diet>
- » <https://www.eatright.org/health/wellness/diet-trends/staying-away-from-fad-diets>
- » <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-basics/guidelines/adults.html>