

# Heart Health all Year Round

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With the abundance of delicious foods, plenty of 'cheer' and undoubtedly a bit of stress mixed in, winding down from the holiday season is an excellent time to treat your cardiovascular system with some extra TLC.

"Find a healthy balance and practice moderation." the Wise (wo)man said.

Data from studies on the top 15 health conditions over the last 20 years - heart disease (HD) is in the top 3 - indicates that diets high in animal foods, refined sugars and poor quality fats, equaled an increase in degenerative disease. Luckily HD responds very well to a healthy diet rich in antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, fiber, phytonutrients and healthy fats. Wise lifestyle choices such as smoking cessation, optimal body weight, regular exercise, minimal alcohol intake, stress reduction, blood sugar control and limiting exposure to toxins all improve your body's ability to be healthy. For that extra boost of TLC practice forgiveness, be less critical of self and others, open your heart to love, and experience joy.

So what are antioxidants? These help to protect cells and arterial walls from oxidative stress caused by free radicals (FR) or damaged fats and reduce the risk of atherosclerosis. Some FR activity is good, but excesses from poor lifestyle choices can cause damage to healthy tissue. Phytochemicals, the elements that provide color, flavor and aroma to foods, and some vitamins & minerals are potent antioxidants. Natural, whole foods provide the best synergistic combination of these elements along with fiber that boost the immune system, ward off free radical damage and reduce inflammation.

Consume all the colors of the rainbow, fresh and organic if possible to limit toxins, raw or lightly cooked, **every day**. Be sure to include dark berries, apples, pineapple, papaya, avocados, tomatoes, broccoli, carrots, celery, beets, garlic and dark leafy greens for qualities that help *prevent LDL oxidation, improve HDL, reduce high blood pressure, balance blood sugar levels and ultimately reduce your risk of HD*. Include legumes, dried peas and beans, for similar benefits with the added bonus of being low in calories. When combined with whole grains, nuts or seeds, they provide a good alternate to meat. These also contribute further to the fiber, vitamin and mineral picture, particularly buckwheat, oat bran and wheat germ. Small amounts of nuts and seeds contribute too with flax, chia and walnuts containing extra healthy Omega 3 fats, also found in hemp seed and cold water fish such as salmon or sardines, canola, soybean (look for organic/non-gmo) Fat is an important topic when it comes to heart health and avoiding hydrogenated, trans-fats, deep fried foods is essential. An oil should remain an oil, most are heat and light sensitive and are best eaten raw. Let extra virgin olive oil become your best friend!

Flavor boosters to any dish - ½ tsp/day of ginger is said to boost the strength of the heart muscle, 1 clove garlic /day also improves peripheral circulation, turmeric contains curcumin which helps prevent clots and reduces inflammation, rosemary and thyme aid in preventing fats from going bad and have antioxidant properties.

Remember to treat yourself with TLC, moderate your intake of sugars, saturated fat and sodium, drink plenty of water, get some fresh air with family and friends and your heart will thank you!