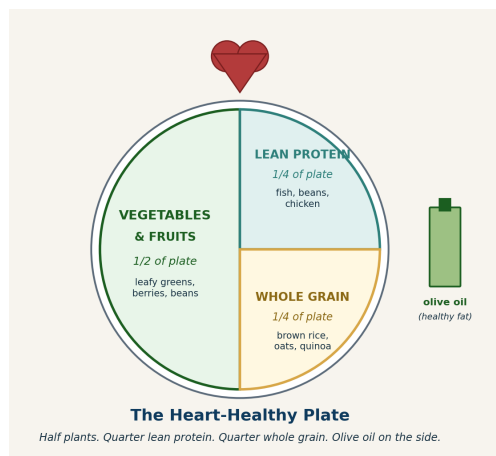


Heart-Healthy Eating

Simple Food Choices That Protect Your Heart

What you eat shapes your heart risk more than almost any pill. This guide turns the Mediterranean and DASH eating plans into small, everyday choices you can make at the grocery store.



Online: <https://go.riasalimd.com/heart-healthy-eating-guide>

Rias KS Ali, MD FACC

Board Certified in Interventional Cardiology & Cardiovascular Disease

4740 Mile Stretch Drive, Holiday FL 34690 | Office: (727) 943-5200 | Fax: (727) 943-5201 | RiasAliMD.com

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Names & Terms You Will Hear

Term	Meaning
Heart-Healthy Diet	An everyday eating pattern that lowers cholesterol, blood pressure, and the risk of heart attack and stroke.
Mediterranean Diet	Built around vegetables, fruit, whole grains, beans, nuts, fish, and olive oil. The eating pattern with the most heart-disease research.
DASH Diet	Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension. Like the Mediterranean diet but with a strong focus on lower sodium to bring blood pressure down.
MyPlate	The USDA's plate-shaped guide showing what each meal should look like. We use a heart-healthy version of it in this guide.
Plant-Forward Eating	Most of your plate comes from plants. Meat is a side dish or skipped. Not the same as vegetarian — just plants-first.
Saturated Fat	The kind of fat in butter, fatty meat, full-fat cheese, and lard. Raises LDL (bad) cholesterol. Aim for less than 6 percent of calories.
Trans Fat	A man-made fat in old margarines and packaged baked goods. Mostly removed from the US food supply. Avoid any you still see.
Added Sugar	Sugar put into food during cooking or packaging — not the natural sugar in fruit or milk. AHA: less than 25 g/day women, 36 g/day men.
Sodium	The part of salt that affects your blood pressure. Limit to 2,300 mg / day. Ideal is under 1,500 mg / day. Most comes from processed foods.
Fiber	The part of plants your body cannot digest. Helps with cholesterol, blood sugar, weight, and constipation. Aim for 25-30 g per day.



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Term	Meaning
Whole Grain	A grain with all three parts of the seed intact: bran, germ, and endosperm. Brown rice, oats, whole wheat, quinoa, barley.
Glycemic Index	How fast a food raises blood sugar. Low-glycemic foods (beans, oats, berries) are heart- and diabetes-friendly.

Three swaps that change everything:

1. Swap **butter for extra-virgin olive oil** at every meal.
2. Swap **soda and juice for water** as the default drink.
3. Swap **white bread / white rice for whole-wheat / brown rice**.

Three habits. Done daily. Better numbers in 8 to 12 weeks.



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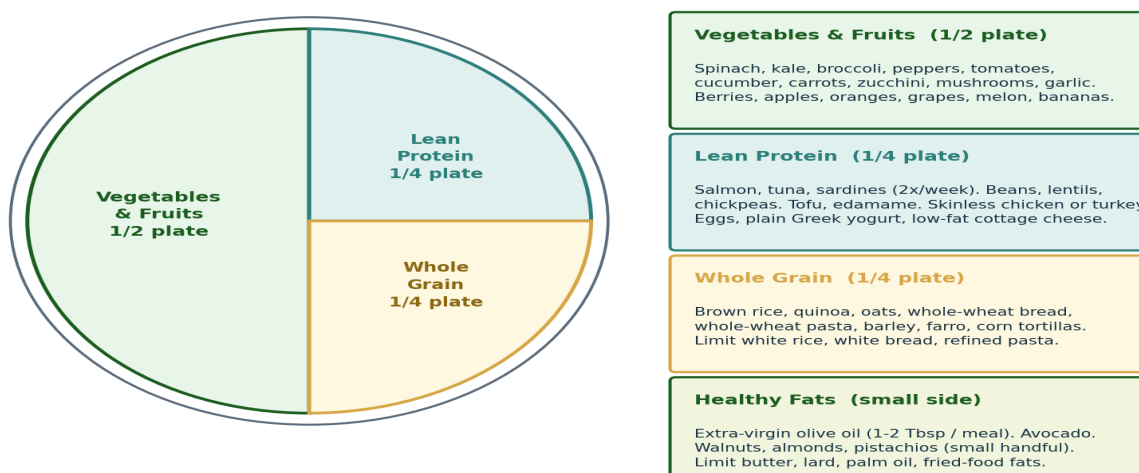


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Heart-Healthy Eating?

- Heart-healthy eating is a daily pattern, not a short-term diet. The two best-studied patterns are the Mediterranean diet and the DASH diet.
- Both eating patterns focus on the same core foods: vegetables, fruit, whole grains, beans, nuts, fish, and olive oil. Both limit processed meats, sugary drinks, refined grains, and salty packaged foods.
- The PREDIMED trial showed the Mediterranean diet cut heart attacks, strokes, and heart-related deaths by about 30 percent in 5 years. No pill alone matches that effect on top of usual care.
- The DASH diet was built to lower blood pressure. With low sodium, it lowers the top blood pressure number by about 8 to 11 mmHg — close to what a single blood pressure pill does.
- The plate method is the simplest way to picture it: half of your plate is vegetables and fruit, a quarter is lean protein, a quarter is whole grain, and a small side of olive oil or nuts adds healthy fat.
- You do not need to be perfect. Small swaps add up. Swapping butter for olive oil, white bread for whole-wheat bread, and soda for water moves you in the right direction every day.
- Most of the sodium in the American diet is HIDDEN in packaged foods and restaurant meals — not in the salt shaker. Reading labels is the single highest-yield habit in this guide.

The Heart-Healthy Plate: What Goes Where



The heart-healthy plate, with the foods that fill each section. Half vegetables and fruit, a quarter lean protein, a quarter whole grain, and a small side of healthy fat. This is the only diagram you need to remember — bring it to the grocery store.



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The plate-method shortcut.

Before you serve anything else: fill **HALF your plate with vegetables and fruit**. Then add a quarter of **lean protein** (fish, beans, chicken). Then a quarter of **whole grain** (brown rice, oats, quinoa, whole-wheat bread). Finish with **1-2 Tablespoons of olive oil** or a small handful of nuts.



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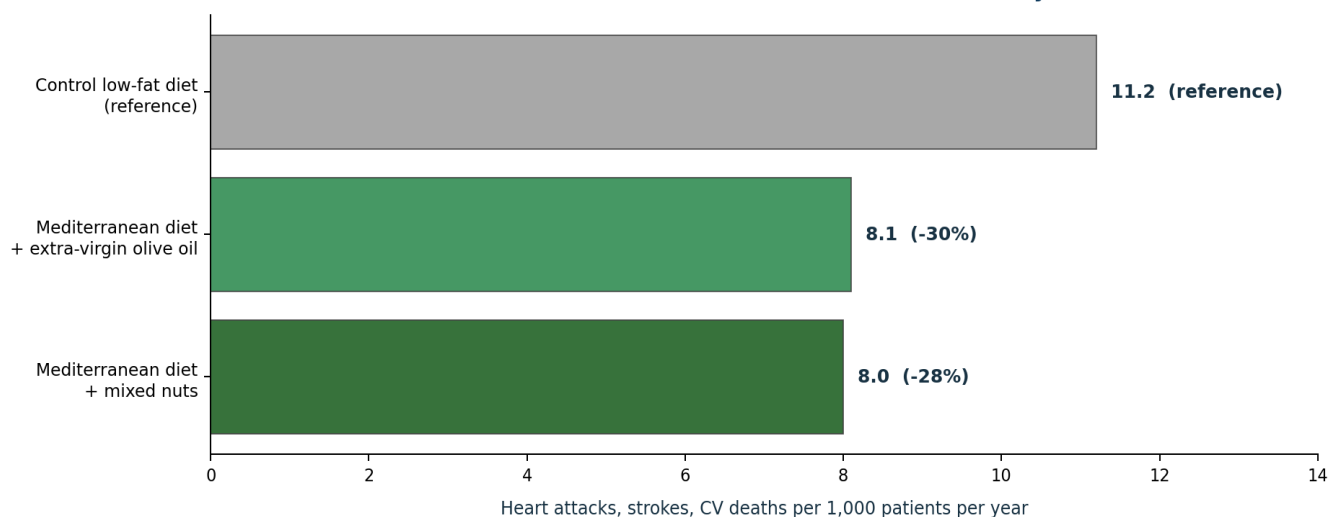


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Why It Matters

- Diet affects every major cardiovascular risk factor: cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar, weight, and inflammation. It works on all of them at once.
- The 2019 ACC/AHA guideline on preventing heart disease specifically recommends a Mediterranean or DASH eating pattern as a first-line lifestyle treatment.
- Even patients who already take statins, blood pressure medicine, and diabetes medicine get added protection from a heart-healthy diet. Food and medicine work together — not one or the other.
- What you eat also affects how you feel: energy, sleep, mood, weight, and how well you tolerate exercise.
- Family habits matter. Children who grow up around heart-healthy meals carry those habits — and avoid early-life weight gain, high blood pressure, and pre-diabetes.
- Where you live affects what is on your plate. Food-desert neighborhoods have fewer affordable fresh-produce options. Frozen and canned vegetables and fruit (no added salt or sugar) are just as healthy as fresh.

PREDIMED Trial: Mediterranean Diet Cuts Heart Events by About 30%



PREDIMED trial: 7,447 patients at high cardiovascular risk followed about 5 years. A Mediterranean diet supplemented with extra-virgin olive oil or mixed nuts cut major heart events (heart attack, stroke, cardiovascular death) by about 30 percent vs. a low-fat control diet. No single dietary pill matches that effect. Source: Estruch R, et al. NEJM 2018.



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Risk Factors

Some patients are more likely to develop this condition. Knowing your risk helps your care team take extra precautions.

Risk Factor	Why It Increases Risk
Known coronary artery disease	Any patient with a prior heart attack, stent, or bypass needs lifelong heart-healthy eating. Diet is part of secondary prevention.
High blood pressure	DASH plus low sodium can drop systolic BP by 8 to 11 mmHg — close to one whole blood-pressure pill. Diet may let your doctor lower a dose.
High cholesterol (LDL)	Less saturated fat and more soluble fiber (oats, beans, fruit) lowers LDL. Works with statins, not in place of them.
Diabetes or prediabetes	Low-glycemic foods (beans, oats, whole grains, non-starchy vegetables) smooth out blood sugar. Diet is the foundation of diabetes care.
Heart failure	Sodium drives fluid retention. Strict sodium limits (under 2,300 mg / day) reduce shortness of breath, swelling, and hospital visits.
Chronic kidney disease	Diet needs are different. You may need to limit potassium, phosphate, and protein. Work with a renal dietitian — do not guess.
On blood thinners (warfarin / Coumadin)	Vitamin K affects warfarin levels. Keep leafy-green servings CONSISTENT week to week — you do not need to avoid them, just keep the dose stable.
Family history of early heart disease	Heart attack or stroke in a parent or sibling before age 55 (men) / 65 (women) — start heart-healthy eating early, even if your numbers look OK.
Overweight / obesity	A heart-healthy eating pattern supports gradual, sustainable weight loss without the rebound seen with crash diets.



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Treatment Options

- **Mediterranean diet, simplified:** half your plate is vegetables and fruit, a quarter is lean protein (fish 2+ times per week, then beans, chicken, tofu), a quarter is whole grain (brown rice, oats, quinoa, whole-wheat bread). Olive oil is the main cooking fat. Nuts are a snack. Red meat is a once-a-week treat, not the daily centerpiece.
- **DASH diet, simplified:** same plate shape as Mediterranean. The added focus: low-fat dairy (yogurt, milk, low-fat cheese), and a hard sodium cap of 2,300 mg per day (ideally 1,500 mg).
- **Vegetables and fruit:** aim for 5+ servings a day. Fresh, frozen, or canned (no-added-salt / no-added-sugar) all count. Variety beats perfection — different colors give different nutrients.
- **Whole grains:** 3 servings per day. Look for the word "WHOLE" as the first ingredient on the label. Whole oats, brown rice, whole-wheat bread, whole-wheat pasta, quinoa, barley.
- **Fish:** 2 servings per week, especially fatty fish like salmon, tuna, mackerel, sardines, or trout. Provides omega-3 fats that protect the heart.
- **Beans, lentils, nuts:** the cheapest and most heart-friendly protein. A handful of unsalted walnuts, almonds, or pistachios as a daily snack. Beans replace meat at 2-3 dinners per week.
- **Healthy fats:** extra-virgin olive oil for cooking and salads. Avocado, nuts, and seeds round it out. Limit butter, lard, palm oil.
- **Sodium under 2,300 mg per day** (ideally under 1,500 mg). The salt you add at the table is only a small piece — most sodium is HIDDEN in bread, deli meats, soups, frozen meals, pizza, sandwiches, and restaurant food. Read every Nutrition Facts label.
- **Added sugar under 25 g per day for women, 36 g for men.** One can of regular soda already blows past the woman's limit. Watch sweetened drinks, flavored yogurt, sweet baked goods, breakfast cereal, and barbecue / pasta sauces.
- **Alcohol:** if you do not drink, do NOT start for your heart. If you do drink: at most 1 drink per day for women, 2 for men. More than that raises blood pressure, heart-rhythm risk, and stroke risk.
- **Water as the default drink.** Unsweetened tea and coffee are fine in moderation. Skip sugary drinks, sports drinks, and sweetened sodas.
- **Cook at home more often.** Restaurant and takeout meals are the single biggest source of hidden sodium and oversized portions in the American diet.



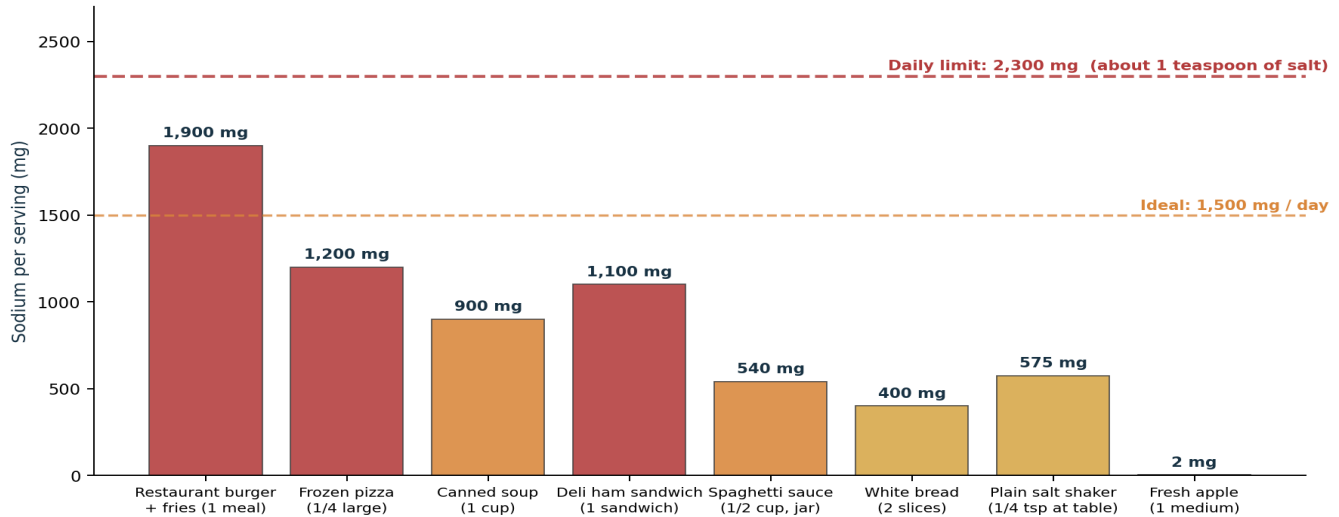
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Where the Sodium Hides: One Restaurant Meal Can Blow the Whole Day



Where the sodium hides. One restaurant burger and fries can blow the whole day's 2,300 mg sodium limit. Whole foods (a fresh apple) are almost sodium-free. Most American sodium comes from packaged and restaurant meals — not the salt shaker.

Eat MORE vs. Eat LESS — the heart-healthy swap list

Eat MORE of these	Eat LESS of these
Vegetables (all kinds): leafy greens, broccoli, peppers, tomatoes, carrots, zucchini	Fried vegetables, vegetables drenched in butter or cream sauce, salty pickled vegetables
Whole fruit: berries, apples, oranges, grapes, melon, bananas, pears (fresh or frozen)	Fruit juice, fruit drinks, canned fruit in heavy syrup, sweetened applesauce
Whole grains: brown rice, oats, quinoa, whole-wheat bread, whole-wheat pasta, barley	White bread, white rice, white pasta, sugary cereal, biscuits, croissants, donuts
Fish (2x/week): salmon, tuna, sardines, mackerel, trout. Beans, lentils, tofu. Skinless chicken, turkey	Processed meats: bacon, sausage, hot dogs, deli meats, salami. Fatty cuts of red meat (more than once a week)
Healthy fats: extra-virgin olive oil, avocado, walnuts, almonds, pistachios (unsalted)	Butter, lard, palm oil, coconut oil, stick margarine, shortening, salted nuts
Plain water, unsweetened tea or coffee, low-fat milk, plain Greek yogurt	Soda, sweetened iced tea, fruit drinks, sports drinks, energy drinks, sweetened coffee drinks



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Eat MORE of these	Eat LESS of these
Spices and herbs: garlic, basil, oregano, rosemary, pepper, lemon, vinegar	Salt at the table, soy sauce (regular), bouillon cubes, high-sodium seasoning blends



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A Day on the Heart-Healthy Plate

- **Breakfast:** oatmeal with berries and a small handful of walnuts. Plain Greek yogurt on the side. Black coffee or tea.
- **Lunch:** a big salad with mixed greens, tomato, cucumber, chickpeas, a few olives, grilled chicken or salmon, drizzle of olive oil and vinegar. Whole-wheat pita on the side. Water.
- **Snack:** a piece of fruit and a small handful of unsalted almonds. Or carrot sticks with hummus.
- **Dinner:** grilled salmon (or beans / lentils / tofu) over brown rice, with steamed broccoli and a leafy-green salad with olive oil and lemon. Water.
- **Dessert (optional):** a small piece of dark chocolate (70% or higher) or a piece of fruit.
- This is one example — not the only one. Build a 5-meal rotation you actually like and repeat it. Variety is great, but consistency is what changes your heart numbers.

Reading a Nutrition Facts label in 30 seconds:

1. Check the **serving size** first. Many packages have 2-3 servings — the numbers multiply.
2. **Sodium per serving:** under 140 mg is LOW, under 400 mg is OK, over 600 mg per serving is HIGH.
3. **Added sugars:** the lower the better. Aim for 0-5 g per serving in most foods.
4. **Saturated fat:** under 3 g per serving is good. Avoid trans fat.



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Comfort Measures at Home (No Medication Needed)

These simple steps support healing and ease symptoms. Use them alongside any medication your doctor prescribes.

- Read the Nutrition Facts label every time you buy a packaged food. Check sodium per serving (under 140 mg = LOW), added sugar (the lower the better), and saturated fat. Then check the serving size — many packages have 2 or 3 servings, so the numbers multiply.
- Shop the OUTSIDE walls of the grocery store first — that is where fresh produce, meat, fish, and dairy live. Then go into the middle aisles for specific staples like oats, beans, and olive oil.
- Use the plate method every meal. Fill HALF your plate with vegetables and fruit before you serve anything else. Then add a quarter-plate of lean protein and a quarter-plate of whole grain.
- Switch one daily habit at a time. Week 1: water instead of soda. Week 2: olive oil instead of butter. Week 3: whole-wheat bread. Small wins stick.
- Cook once, eat twice. Make extra portions of fish, beans, or grain bowls for lunch the next day. It cuts cost and makes the healthy choice the easy choice.
- Restaurant survival: ask for sauces and dressings on the side, request no added salt, split a meal with a partner or take half home in a box, and skip the bread basket. Choose grilled, baked, or steamed over fried.
- Snack smart: a handful of nuts, plain Greek yogurt with berries, vegetables and hummus, a piece of fruit. Skip chips and sweet baked goods.
- Build a 5-meal rotation you can repeat: a few breakfasts, lunches, and dinners you actually like. You do not need 50 recipes — you need 5 you will use.



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*Fresh vegetables at the USDA Farmers Market, Washington, D.C. The Mediterranean and DASH eating patterns are built around real, recognizable foods — produce, whole grains, beans, fish, and olive oil — not specialty products or supplements.
Credit: Lance Cheung / U.S. Department of Agriculture (Public Domain).*



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Risks, Benefits, and Alternatives

Every choice has trade-offs. Use this table to start the shared decision conversation.

Option	Risks	Benefits	Alternatives
Mediterranean / DASH eating pattern	Costs more time and planning at first. Healthy oils, fish, and produce can cost more than packaged foods — though beans, oats, frozen produce, and store-brand olive oil keep it affordable.	About 30% lower risk of heart attack and stroke (PREDIMED). Lower BP, LDL cholesterol, blood sugar, and weight. Better energy and sleep.	Plant-based, vegetarian, or vegan diets — also strongly heart-healthy if planned. Crash diets and very-low-carb diets — short-term weight loss but harder to keep up and less heart-healthy data.
Strict low-sodium diet (under 1,500 mg)	Food tastes flatter at first. Eating out is harder. Some patients with low-renin hypertension see less effect.	Drops systolic BP another 5 to 7 mmHg on top of DASH. Big benefit for heart failure, kidney disease, and older adults.	Standard 2,300 mg limit (still helpful, easier to live with). Diuretic medication — works but does not address the source.
Cutting added sugar (under 25-36 g / day)	Hardest for sweetened-drink habit. Withdrawal-type fatigue and cravings in the first 1-2 weeks.	Lower triglycerides, less belly fat, better insulin sensitivity, lower blood pressure, and better dental health.	Artificial sweeteners (sucralose, stevia) — short-term substitute but evidence on long-term heart effects is mixed. Water is best.
Moderate alcohol (1-2 drinks / day max)	Raises BP, atrial fibrillation, breast cancer, and stroke risk at higher amounts. "Sensitive" patients react to even small amounts.	Possible small heart benefit in some studies — but the benefit is small and the risks scale fast with more drinks.	No alcohol at all — the safest choice for atrial fibrillation, high blood pressure, and breast cancer risk. AHA: do not start drinking for your heart.



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Common Misconceptions

Myth	Reality
"Eggs are bad for your heart."	For most adults, 1 egg a day is fine — even with high cholesterol. Saturated fat in the rest of the meal (bacon, butter, cheese) matters more than the egg itself. Talk to your doctor if you have diabetes or known heart disease.
"Salt only matters if you add it at the table."	About 70 percent of the sodium Americans eat is HIDDEN in packaged and restaurant food — bread, deli meats, soup, frozen dinners, sandwiches, sauces. Reading labels matters more than the shaker.
"Fruit has too much sugar to be heart-healthy."	Whole fruit is heart-healthy. The fiber slows down the sugar. Fruit JUICE is different — same sugar, no fiber. Eat the fruit, skip the juice.
"Coconut oil is healthy because it is plant-based."	Coconut oil is over 80 percent saturated fat — more than butter. It raises LDL cholesterol. Use olive oil instead. "Plant-based" does not always mean heart-healthy.
"A glass of red wine every day is good for your heart."	The AHA says: if you do not drink, do NOT start for your heart. Any benefit from red wine is small, and the risks (high BP, heart rhythm problems, cancer) climb fast with more than 1-2 drinks.
"If a food says \"low-fat,\" it is heart-healthy."	Many low-fat packaged foods replace the fat with sugar and salt. Always check the Nutrition Facts label — not just the front of the box. "Low-fat" is not the same as "heart-healthy."
"Bread and grains are bad for your heart."	WHOLE grains (brown rice, oats, whole wheat, quinoa) lower heart disease and stroke risk. Refined grains (white bread, white rice, white pasta) are less helpful. Read for the word "whole" first.



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Possible Complications

Knowing what can go wrong helps you spot problems early. Most complications are uncommon, especially with treatment.

Where / What	What Can Happen
High blood pressure	A diet high in sodium and processed foods raises blood pressure. Long-term high BP damages arteries, heart, kidneys, and brain.
High cholesterol	Diets high in saturated fat (butter, fatty meat, full-fat cheese, coconut oil) raise LDL cholesterol. LDL builds plaque in arteries.
Type 2 diabetes	Diets high in sugary drinks, refined grains, and processed foods drive insulin resistance. Heart-healthy eating helps prevent and manage diabetes.
Heart attack and stroke	Poor diet adds up over years to plaque-filled arteries, high BP, diabetes, and obesity — the foundations of heart attack and stroke.
Heart failure flare-ups	For patients with heart failure, high-sodium meals can trigger shortness of breath, swelling, and ER visits within days.
Weight gain and metabolic syndrome	Sweetened drinks, large portions, and processed foods drive weight gain — especially belly fat — and the cluster of risks called metabolic syndrome.

Special Situations — Heart Failure, Diabetes, Kidney Disease, Warfarin

- **Heart failure (HFrEF or HFpEF):** the sodium cap is strict. Under 2,300 mg per day — many patients do better around 1,500 mg. Weigh yourself every morning. Call us if you gain 2 lb overnight or 5 lb in a week. Fluid intake matters mostly if your sodium level is low — your team will tell you.
- **Type 2 diabetes:** the Mediterranean plate IS the diabetes plate. Focus on low-glycemic foods — beans, lentils, oats, whole grains, non-starchy vegetables, berries. Limit sugary drinks, white bread, white rice, and sweet baked goods. Plate timing: eat protein and fiber FIRST, then the starch — your blood sugar will rise more slowly.



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- **Chronic kidney disease (CKD stage 3+):** the standard heart-healthy diet may need changes. You may need to limit potassium (oranges, bananas, potatoes, tomatoes), phosphate (dairy, dark sodas, processed foods), and protein. Please work with a renal dietitian — do not guess from the internet.
- **Warfarin (Coumadin):** you do NOT need to avoid leafy greens. The key is CONSISTENCY — eat the SAME amount of leafy greens week to week so your INR stays stable. A sudden change (starting or stopping a big salad habit) can swing your INR. Call us before making a big change.
- **Older adults living alone:** small frozen vegetable bags, canned beans, canned (no-salt-added) tomatoes, plain oats, and bagged salad greens make heart-healthy meals fast and low-waste. Meals on Wheels and local senior-center programs can help.
- **Pregnancy and breastfeeding:** the Mediterranean pattern is safe and recommended. Avoid high-mercury fish (king mackerel, shark, swordfish, tilefish). Salmon, sardines, and canned light tuna are safe and provide omega-3s.



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Cost, Time, and Access — Heart-Healthy Eating in the Real World

- **Beans, lentils, and oats are cheap.** A pound of dry beans feeds a family for under \$2. A pound of oats is even less. These are the foundation of an affordable heart-healthy plate.
- **Frozen and canned produce count.** Frozen vegetables and fruit (no added salt or sugar) are picked at peak ripeness and are just as nutritious as fresh — often cheaper and longer-lasting.
- **Store brands save 20-40 percent.** Store-brand olive oil, oats, beans, canned tomatoes, and whole-wheat bread are usually as good as name brands at lower cost.
- **WIC and SNAP cover heart-healthy foods.** Many farmers' markets accept SNAP / EBT and offer double-up bucks for produce. Ask at the customer-service counter.
- **Food deserts and limited access:** if fresh produce is hard to find near you, frozen and canned options are excellent. Community gardens, food cooperatives, and CSA boxes are growing in many neighborhoods.
- **Cook once, eat twice (or four times).** A big pot of beans or a baked salmon fillet covers 2-3 meals. Time spent on Sunday saves 4 weeknight dinners.
- **Family meals matter.** Children who eat with family eat more vegetables, less fast food, and gain healthier habits. Make heart-healthy eating a family project, not a solo diet.

Public health note from Dr. Ali. Heart-healthy eating is the single most powerful preventive cardiology tool we have — bigger than any one medicine. The barriers are real: food deserts, time, cost, and family habits. Frozen and canned produce (no added salt or sugar) are just as healthy as fresh. Beans and oats are cheaper than most snack foods. School lunch standards, community gardens, and the AHA's family-meal campaigns all push the needle. Talk to your family, neighbors, and school board — this is a community health issue, not just a personal choice.



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Points to Know

If you remember nothing else, remember these key points.

- Eat MORE plants. Half of every plate is vegetables and fruit.
- Eat fish 2 times a week. Salmon, tuna, sardines, mackerel, or trout.
- Use olive oil as your main cooking fat. Skip butter and lard.
- Whole grains beat refined grains. Look for "whole" as the first word on the bread or pasta label.
- Limit sodium to 2,300 mg per day. Ideal is 1,500 mg. Most sodium is HIDDEN in packaged and restaurant foods, not the salt shaker.
- Limit added sugar to 25 g per day (women) or 36 g per day (men). One can of regular soda is more than that.
- Drink water as the default. Skip sugary drinks, juice, and most sports drinks.
- If you do not drink alcohol, do not start. If you do, keep it to 1 drink a day for women, 2 for men.
- Read the Nutrition Facts label — every time. The front of the package is marketing.
- You do not need to be perfect. Small swaps every day add up to a 30 percent lower heart-attack and stroke risk.



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When to Call Us - and When to Call 911

If you are not sure, call. We would rather hear from you twice than miss a real problem.

- **Call 911** for chest pressure or pain, sudden shortness of breath, weakness on one side, trouble talking, sudden bad headache, or fainting. These are heart-attack and stroke warning signs.
- **Call our office (727-943-5200)** if you have heart failure and gained more than 2 pounds overnight, or 5 pounds in a week. Often this is a salty meal — but it can be a fluid build-up that needs adjustment.
- **Call us if** you take warfarin (Coumadin) and you are about to make a big change in leafy-green vegetables — we may need to check an INR.
- **Call us if** you have advanced kidney disease and want to start a new eating plan. The standard heart-healthy diet may need modification for potassium and phosphate.
- **Call us if** you are losing weight without trying, having trouble swallowing, or have a poor appetite that lasts more than a few days.
- **Ask us for a referral** to a registered dietitian if you want personalized planning. Many insurance plans cover dietitian visits for patients with heart disease, diabetes, or high blood pressure.

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See also: our companion guides. Heart-healthy eating is one part of a broader prevention plan. For high blood pressure, see go.riasalimd.com/htn-guide. For coronary disease, see go.riasalimd.com/cad-guide. For heart failure, see go.riasalimd.com/hf-guide. For cardiac rehab, see go.riasalimd.com/cardiac-rehab-guide.



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Trusted Resources

The links below are the trusted resources Dr. Ali used to write this guide and that he recommends you visit for more information. Each is a clickable link in the digital version and a Short.io tracked URL on the printed version.

- [AHA — Healthy Eating \(heart.org\)](https://heart.org) - Official AHA patient page with recipes, shopping tips, and the Eat Smart guidance behind this guide.
- [NHLBI — DASH Eating Plan](https://nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dash/) - Federal source for the DASH diet — daily and weekly servings, sample menus, and printable plans.
- [USDA MyPlate](https://www.myplate.gov/) - The plate-method tool used in this guide. Free meal planners, recipes, and a personalized MyPlate Plan.
- [Oldways — Mediterranean Diet Pyramid](https://oldwaysdietpyramid.org/) - Practical Mediterranean-diet resource with recipes, shopping lists, and a printable pyramid.
- [Cleveland Clinic — Heart-Healthy Diet](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/heart-healthy-diet/) - Plain-language overview with portion sizes, label reading, and restaurant tips.
- [Mayo Clinic — Heart-Healthy Diet: 8 Steps](https://www.mayoclinic.org/heart-healthy-diet/8-steps/) - Mayo's 8-step framework with sample swaps and recipes.
- [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics — Find a Dietitian](https://www.eatright.org/find-a-dietitian/) - Search for a registered dietitian near you. Most plans cover dietitian visits for patients with heart disease or diabetes.



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Sources Used to Build This Guide

Every recommendation in this guide is grounded in one or more of the studies, guidelines, or trusted resources below. Short links are tracked so Dr. Ali can see which references patients are reading; nothing personally identifying is captured.

- [2021 AHA Dietary Guidance to Improve Cardiovascular Health: A Scientific Statement \(Lichtenstein et al., Circulation 2021; PMID 34724806\)](#) [Scientific Statement]
Primary AHA anchor for the 10 core heart-healthy eating principles: emphasize plants, whole grains, fish, plant proteins, healthy fats, minimize added sugars, salt, alcohol, and processed foods. Frames the entire guide.
- [Primary Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease with a Mediterranean Diet Supplemented with Extra-Virgin Olive Oil or Nuts \(PREDIMED, Estruch et al., NEJM 2018; PMID 29897866\)](#) [Clinical Trial]
Landmark trial showing ~30% reduction in major cardiovascular events with Mediterranean diet vs control. Source for the guide's headline Mediterranean section.
- [Effects on Blood Pressure of Reduced Dietary Sodium and the DASH Diet \(Sacks et al., DASH-Sodium Trial, NEJM 2001; PMID 11136953\)](#) [Clinical Trial]
Foundational DASH-Sodium evidence: combining DASH eating pattern with low sodium lowers systolic BP by ~8-11 mmHg. Underpins sodium target and DASH section.
- [2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans \(USDA / HHS, 9th Edition\)](#) [Guideline]
Federal source for added-sugar limits (<10% of calories), saturated fat (<10%), sodium (<2,300 mg/day), alcohol (≤1/day women, ≤2 men), and MyPlate framework adapted to a heart-healthy plate.
- [AHA — Added Sugars Recommendations \(Johnson et al., Circulation 2009; updated 2016\)](#) [Scientific Statement]
Source for the AHA-specific added-sugar caps: <25 g/day for women, <36 g/day for men. Used in the added-sugar callout and label-reading section.
- [2019 ACC/AHA Guideline on the Primary Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease \(Arnett et al., JACC 2019; PMID 30894318\)](#) [Guideline]
Cornerstone primary-prevention document — explicitly endorses Mediterranean and DASH eating patterns; ties diet to ASCVD risk reduction. Anchors the 'Why It Matters' section.
- [2022 AHA/ACC/HFSA Guideline for the Management of Heart Failure \(Heidenreich et al., Circulation 2022; PMID 35379503\)](#) [Guideline]
Source for heart-failure-specific dietary advice: sodium restriction (<2,300 mg/day), fluid awareness if hyponatremic. Used in the 'Special Situations' subsection.
- [Cleveland Clinic — Heart-Healthy Diet](#) [Patient Education]
Plain-language framing reference for portion-size tips, label reading, and grocery-cart guidance. Patient-voice benchmark for accessibility.
- [Mayo Clinic — Heart-Healthy Diet: 8 Steps to Prevent Heart Disease](#) [Patient Education]
Competitor patient-education benchmark. Used for portion-control language, plate-method framing, and saturated-fat swap examples.
- [AHA — How Much Sodium Should I Eat Per Day? \(heart.org consumer page\)](#) [Patient Education]
Source for the patient-facing sodium target (<1,500 mg ideal, <2,300 mg practical) and the 'salty six' framing (bread, cold cuts, pizza, soup, sandwiches, burritos).



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- [AAFP — Heart-Healthy Diet \(American Family Physician\)](#) *[Patient Education]*
Family-medicine-vetted patient framing for grocery-list practical tips and a foods-to-eat-vs-limit table that mirrors the guide's two-column structure.
- [USDA MyPlate Plan](#) *[Patient Education]*
Visual anchor for the plate method (1/2 vegetables, 1/4 lean protein, 1/4 whole grain). Adapted to a heart-healthy version with a side of healthy fat.
- [NHLBI — DASH Eating Plan \(National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute\)](#) *[Patient Education]*
Public-domain federal source for DASH meal patterns and daily/weekly serving guidance. Companion to the DASH-Sodium trial reference.



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About This Guide

Rias KS Ali, MD FACC | Board Certified in Interventional Cardiology & Cardiovascular Disease

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Reviewer note: Reviewed AHA Eating Plans (heart.org), Cleveland Clinic Heart-Healthy Diet page, and Mayo Clinic 8 Steps to a Heart-Healthy Diet. This guide adds: a hidden-sodium bar chart with the salty-six framing and the 2,300 mg / 1,500 mg target lines; a PREDIMED trial event-reduction chart; a full plate-method diagram with example foods; special-situation subsections for heart failure, diabetes, kidney disease, and warfarin; and grocery-store, label-reading, and restaurant-survival tips that competitor sources usually mention only in passing.

Disclaimer

This guide is for educational purposes only and does not replace medical advice from your physician. Recommendations may not apply to every patient. Always follow the specific instructions of Dr. Ali and your care team. In an emergency call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.



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