



REGENERA
MEDICAL



12 FOODS THAT ARE GOOD FOR YOUR HEART (INCLUDING, YES, AVOCADOS)

By JESSICA ESTRADA, NOVEMBER 28, 2018



Photo: Getty Images/Voloshin311

Here's a shocker: According to new research published in the journal *Circulation*, 31 percent of people hospitalized for heart attacks in 2010-2014 were young women. Add to that the fact that heart disease is the leading cause of death for women in the United States, and it should be pretty clear to everyone that heart problems are not just an old dude thing.

Thankfully, there are some simple tweaks most women can make to ensure their heart stays healthy, like combining cardio and weight training, having mind-blowing sex, and doing household chores (honestly I'm less excited about that one). But experts agree that eating certain foods can also nourish your ticker in a major way, and can help reduce your risk of having things like high cholesterol and heart disease when eaten as part of a healthy lifestyle.

Here, two doctors share 12 foods that are good for your heart as well as how to eat them to reap the benefits. While "heart healthy" doesn't always translate to delicious (looking at you, whole wheat pasta), consider these legit-delicious picks added to my regular meal prep rotation:

1. Salmon

"With its appealing hue and buttery texture, salmon is an excellent source of omega-3 fatty acids," says Jaelyn Tolentino, DO, of Parsley Health. "Increased consumption of salmon has been proven to decrease inflammation, triglyceride levels, blood pressure, and your risk of stroke or heart failure," thanks to the presence of those fatty acids, adds **Elroy Vojdani, MD, IFMCP**, functional medicine practitioner and founder of Regenera Medical. Bonus points for it also being good for your brain, hair and nails.



Dr. Vojdani recommends getting in two to four servings of a clean seafood source like salmon each week. You can pop it into the oven covered in rosemary and lemon, he says, or mix things up with Ashley Benson’s simple coconut salmon recipe with asparagus (yum).

2. Chia seeds

It’s no secret that chia seeds are an ancient nutritional powerhouse. They too are packed with omega-3 fatty acids, says Dr. Vojdani, which help raise your good cholesterol and protect against heart disease. Other reasons to consume the super seeds: They’re filled with antioxidants, fiber, iron, and calcium. And their mild, earthy taste makes it easy to incorporate them in tons of recipes for an extra heart-healthy boost.

Dr. Vojdani suggests adding a tablespoon of them into a glass of water and mixing it with two tablespoons of rose water. Let it sit for 10 minutes for the seeds to expand and then drink up. You can also throw them into your pre-workout smoothie to keep you full while you sweat; make swoon-worthy pudding; pop them in tropical popsicles; create a pina colada-inspired parfait; or get boozy with a watermelon and chia seed cocktail.

3. Red wine

Red wine has long been believed to help heart health, although research on the subject is admittedly mixed. Most studies have been observational (meaning that it’s not clear if red wine is truly the cause of better heart health), and there hasn’t yet been a large, long-term study on the subject. But Dr. Vojdani is one of many experts who still believes in its health benefits. “It contains large amounts of a potent antioxidant called resveratrol, which has been proven to protect your arteries from potential damage and also reduce the amount of bad cholesterol in your blood,” he says. “This antioxidant has also been shown to help repair the protective barrier of your brain, called the blood-brain barrier, thus protecting your brain from inflammation as well.”

Obviously, that doesn’t mean it’s okay to go to town on a whole bottle every night. Healthy alcohol consumption is up to one drink per day max for women. Beyond that, the protective effects of resveratrol are counteracted by the negative effects of the alcohol.



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4. Swiss chard

“We throw the word ‘superfood’ around a lot, but Swiss chard truly deserves this title,” Dr. Vojdani says. “It’s loaded with vitamins including A, C, E, and K, as well as nutrients like magnesium and potassium, and antioxidants lutein and zeaxanthin, all of which have proven heart benefits.” The leafy green veggie is also good for bone health, reducing blood pressure, and protecting your eyes from macular degeneration, he adds.

Need some Swiss chard cooking inspo? Dr. Vojdani votes for sautéing it with your favorite cooking oil and Himalayan sea salt. Or, you can get fancy and whip up a minestrone chard soup with garlic croutons or a Jennifer Garner-approved salad.

5. Pomegranates

According to research, antioxidant-packed pomegranate seeds are miracle workers. “In an Israeli study, a daily dose of pomegranate extract was given to patients for one year,” Dr. Vojdani says. “The dose reversed plaque-related clogging of patients’ arteries and reduced their blood pressure by 21 percent without having to do anything else.” These artery-clearing, blood pressure-reducing benefits have been found with subsequent research, too.

That’s reason enough to top your overnight oats, acai bowl, or salad with them, or to sip on pomegranate juice on the reg. And in case you need some help popping open a pomegranate without staining everything red (been there), Chrissy Teigen has your back.

6. Flaxseeds

Right up there on the list of most popular superfoods are flaxseeds and with good reason. They’re high in fiber, protein, and omega-3s, and help reduce LDL-cholesterol and blood pressure, says Dr. Tolentino. She recommends opting for ground seeds over whole flaxseeds, which can be harder for the body to absorb and digest.

Similar to chia seeds, you can add flaxseeds to lots of recipes including baked goodies, salad dressings, and granola. Dr. Tolentino suggests sprinkling one or two tablespoons over yogurt or adding some to a smoothie.

7. Avocado

“Creamy, emerald-colored avocados aren’t just a great salad or toast topper,” Dr. Tolentino says. “They’re also packed with healthy monounsaturated fat.” She says it doesn’t just lower “bad” LDL cholesterol, it also raises good HDL cholesterol and lowers blood pressure.

So, you heard it. Doctor’s orders: Load up on the guac or satisfy your sweet tooth with healthy, yet incredibly decadent, avocado chocolate pudding.



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8. Beets

“Beets are rich in nitrates and the B-vitamin folate, which together improve blood pressure and lower your risk for cardiovascular disease,” Dr. Tolentino says. Nitrates, she explains, are converted in to nitric oxide that dilates blood vessels and thus lowers blood pressure. (These nitrates, btw, are different from the nitrates added to processed meats to ensure freshness—that stuff is linked with increased cancer risk.)

Beets are especially good for athletes as they help increase performance. You can add them to a pre-workout smoothie to give it a sweet and earthy taste and an Instagram-worthy magenta hue. Or, whip up an immune-boosting beet hummus.

9. Dark chocolate

There’s no shame in a 3 p.m. dark chocolate snack. According to Dr. Tolentino, it’s actually good for your heart. “Dark chocolate derives its health benefits from compounds called flavanols, which encourage the body’s production of nitric oxide, important for keeping blood vessels in a dilated or relaxed state” she says.

The delicious treat is also said to help with weight loss, preventing pancreatic cancer, decreasing inflammation...and it might even make you smarter. To reap the most benefits, she recommends opting for 70 percent or more cacao. Just remember: A serving size isn’t a whole bar, it’s 1 ounce.

10. Blueberries

Antioxidant-rich blueberries are rife with health benefits including cognitive support, reducing blood sugar, lowering blood pressure, and halting the progression of prehypertension, says Dr. Tolentino—all of which translate to a healthier and less-stressed heart.

Dr. Vojdani adds that blueberries are also low in sugar and high in vitamins C and K, which can protect against bad cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease. “They also have been shown to decrease damage to our DNA, which may eventually lead to cancer,” he says.



Try to go for fresh and organic, if you can. You can snack on them, eat them as dessert, or throw them into a high-fiber smoothie.

11. Olive oil

Like your beloved avocado, olive oil is great source of heart-healthy monounsaturated fats. These fats, Dr. Vojdani says, are a major component of our brain cells so olive oil is good for your brain health too.

“Freshly pressed extra virgin olive oil also contains large amounts of antioxidants which help protect against the formation of inflammatory plaque in your arteries, thus reducing your risk of a future heart attack,” Dr. Vojdani adds.

That said, not all olive oils are created equal so make sure you’re buying good quality olive oil. Dr. Vojdani advises opting for ones that are stored in a dark bottle which protects light-sensitive antioxidants from degrading. Also, check the “produced on” date to ensure it’s fresh.

Another thing to note about olive oil, Dr. Tolentino says, is that it has a low smoke point. Using it to cook at a high temperature will cause the fat to oxidize (which lessens its benefits and potentially forms free radicals). So if you’re sautéing veggies, for example, use a different oil like safflower oil. “Save olive oil for salad dressings or drizzling over steamed vegetables,” she says.

12. Walnuts

“Most nuts are a fantastic source of polyunsaturated fat—the good fats—you should be aiming to enjoy more of,” Dr. Tolentino says. “But walnuts in particular stand out for their abundant quantities of omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants,” both of which are crucial for a healthy heart. Dr. Vojdani adds that walnuts have also been linked to reducing the risk of certain cancers, obesity, and high blood pressure.

Like with all nuts, there are tons of way you can get walnuts into your diet. Grab a handful to snack on before a workout. Add them to salads for some extra protein. Toss them into GF cookie dough. The sky’s the limit.

<https://www.wellandgood.com/good-food/foods-that-are-good-for-your-heart/>