



**Comfort  
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## Senior Nutrition: Foods that Can Reduce the Risk of Heart Disease

### Heart Health as We Age

As we age, the risk of heart disease can increase due to a condition known as atherosclerosis. Atherosclerosis occurs when the arteries begin to narrow from plaque buildup in the arterial walls, disrupting blood flow throughout the body. If blood flow stops altogether, from a blood clot, the outcome could include a heart attack or stroke.

While unhealthy lifestyle choices, such as lack of physical activity and/or smoking, can trigger atherosclerosis, poor diet can also be a cause. Foods high in salt and fat can result in high blood pressure, high levels of cholesterol, and high blood sugar levels – all of which are factors that can increase the risk of atherosclerosis (and heart disease) significantly.

Seniors who configure their diets to include healthy foods can make a profound impact on the health of their hearts. In fact, it's been reported that 70% of heart disease can be prevented with correct nutrition. Here are some of the foods that seniors – under proper supervision from a physician and/or dietician – can incorporate into their diet to reduce the risk of heart disease.

### Foods that Can Reduce the Risk of Heart Disease

- **Berries:** Blueberries, strawberries, cranberries, and raspberries are all beneficial when it comes to your heart, due primarily to their plentiful supply of antioxidants – which reduce damage caused by free radicals in the body.
- **Oranges:** The potassium found in oranges helps to maintain blood pressure, while the pectin (a high source of water-soluble fiber found in the pith and pulp) collects the cholesterol from ingested food, reducing absorption. Additionally, recent research indicates that citrus pectin aids in neutralizing galectin-3, a protein that damages heart tissue.
- **Apples:** Comparing apples to oranges may not be such a bad idea after all, as the former also contains pectin. Its fiber content also aids in removing cholesterol. With all of its benefits together, daily apple consumption can reduce LDL cholesterol by 40%.
- **Nuts:** Although nuts have a high level of fat, it is primarily monounsaturated and helps lower LDL (bad) cholesterol and increase HDL (good) cholesterol. Nuts also contain essential vitamins and minerals, such as folic acid, niacin, vitamin B, and vitamin E – all of which aid in helping the heart.
- **Avocados:** Similar to nuts, avocados are full of monounsaturated fats that help to reduce LDL cholesterol. The one downside is that avocados contain a high number of calories, so it's best to consume in moderation.
- **Fish:** Omega-3 fatty acids – often found in salmon, trout, and other cold water fish – work to simultaneously reduce triglycerides and raise HDL. Sardines, in particular, are said to provide the greatest number of Omega-3 fatty acids, compared to other cold-water fish. Note that the American Heart Association recommends two servings of fish at least twice a week.
- **Asparagus:** Similar to berries and other fruits and vegetables, asparagus is full of free radical-neutralizing antioxidants. It's also a great source of vitamins A, C, E, and K, fiber, and beta-carotene. Just be sure not to overcook or boil it for too long, as this can compromise the nutritional content.

### Fast Fact

The American Heart Association estimates that nearly 66% of cardiovascular disease deaths occur in people age 75 and older.

- **Oatmeal:** Unprocessed oatmeal – free of added sugar – can reduce cholesterol due to its beta-glucan content. Try adding fresh berries to your oatmeal for flavor and added benefits.
- **Red Wine:** Resveratrol, an antioxidant-rich compound found in certain berries and grapes, is what makes red wine heart-healthy, but most health professionals advise drinking no more than one glass a day. Anything past that and one's risk of heart and liver damage can increase.
- **Dark Chocolate:** The flavonols found in cocoa – chocolate's plant source – can reduce blood pressure, maintain blood flow, and relax the arteries. To get the most out of dark chocolate, choose a bar that is at least 70% cocoa. Be sure that cocoa is the first listed ingredient, as opposed to sugar.

### **Nutrition Along with a Healthy Lifestyle**

One of the added benefits of choosing heart-healthy foods is that they supply other organs in the body with essential nutrients, adding to physical well-being. However, one should not rely solely on a heart-healthy diet in order to prevent heart disease.

In addition to taking steps to establish a daily exercise routine (including at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity – with permission from a doctor or physician), seniors should also monitor their cardiovascular health regularly by visiting a doctor or physician. Regular consultation with a health professional can provide further insights into how to prevent heart disease, but it may also help in detecting other issues early on.

### **Comfort Keepers® Can Help**

Our compassionate, professional in-home caregivers can help promote a heart-healthy lifestyle for your loved one. From healthy meal preparation to transportation to a gym or local senior center, we are ready to help provide what he or she needs to live a happy, healthy, and independent life. Ask your local Comfort Keepers office today about how their services can make a difference in your loved one's life.

### **References:**

American Heart Association. "What is Cardiovascular Disease?" Web. 2016.  
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 WebMD. "Top 11 Heart-Healthy Foods" by Kerri-Ann Jennings, MS, RD. Web. 2016.