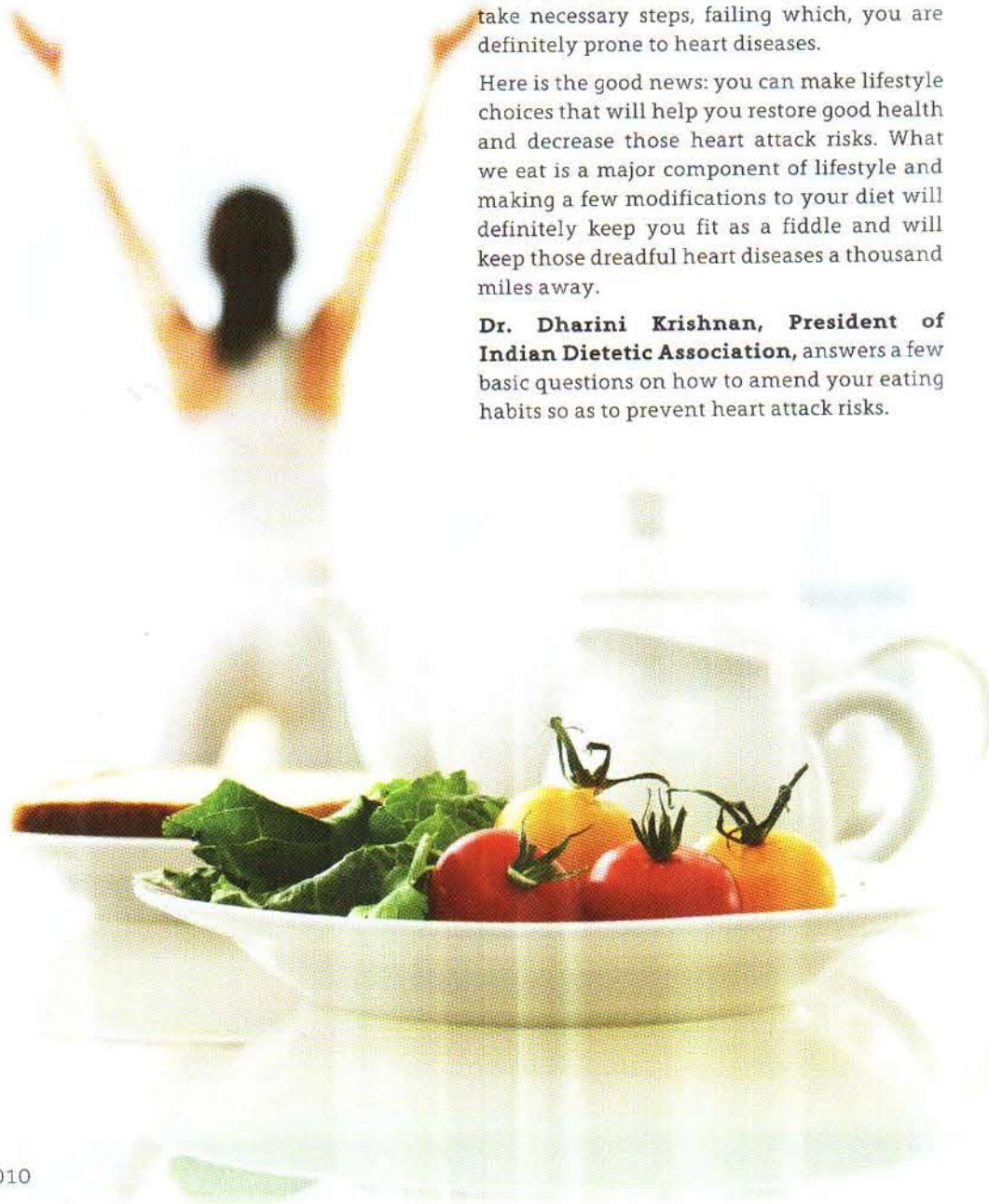


Eat your way to a healthy heart



Going back to the medical laboratory to get your test results can be bloodcurdling. Your cholesterol is far above the ground, your blood pressure is skyrocketing too, you weigh 20 pounds more than you should and you don't remember the last time you exercised. Now, you've been warned by the doctor to take necessary steps, failing which, you are definitely prone to heart diseases.

Here is the good news: you can make lifestyle choices that will help you restore good health and decrease those heart attack risks. What we eat is a major component of lifestyle and making a few modifications to your diet will definitely keep you fit as a fiddle and will keep those dreadful heart diseases a thousand miles away.

Dr. Dharini Krishnan, President of Indian Dietetic Association, answers a few basic questions on how to amend your eating habits so as to prevent heart attack risks.

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How does the food we eat affect our risk of heart disease?

What we eat is directly correlated to our heart, without a doubt. For instance, if your intake has too many simple carbohydrates (refined carbs) like white flour, corn syrup and sugar, the triglyceride in your body increases, which could lead to a block in your artery. Although, white rice is a complex carbohydrate, the way we cook it and the quantity we consume can have deleterious effect on your blood chemistry. Consuming lot of trans fatty acids as in hydrogenated oils can lead to increase in the bad cholesterol. These are present in puffs that are widely consumed by the public at large.

Can eating a heart-healthy diet improve already diagnosed heart disease?

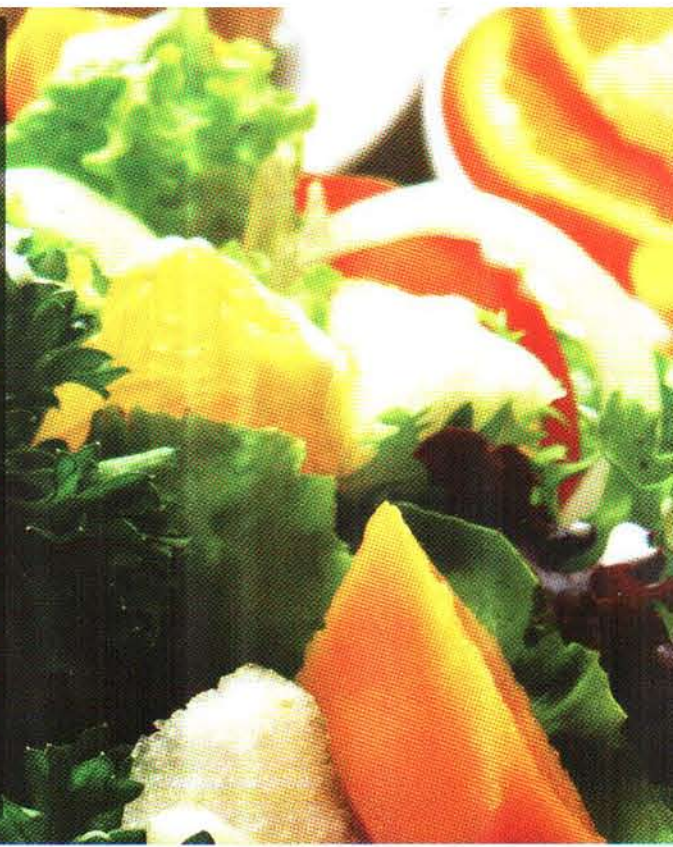
Definitely. Adapting a fiber rich diet and altering your proportion of fat from saturated fats to monounsaturated fats (MUFA) and polyunsaturated fats will not only avoid worsening your heart condition but improve it. Changing the proportion of fat you consume, is especially important for youngsters who are diagnosed with heart related diseases.

What are the basic ingredients of a heart-healthy diet?

The mantra is fiber. The more you acclimatize yourself to a fiber dense diet, lesser the calories you consume. As most of you already know, you find plenty of fiber in vegetables and fruits. The digestion of the food, the way the glucose is released and the formation of triglycerides depend largely on fiber. There are two types of fiber in food; insoluble and soluble. Insoluble fiber is found in bran, fruit and vegetable peels, legumes, whole grain and flax seeds. For example, when you eat an orange, eating it with the white skin outside is better than eating just the flesh. On the other hand, plantain has soluble fiber, which has its benefits too. The advantage of insoluble fiber is that it fills up your stomach quickly and hence you can lessen your refined carbohydrates intake. This has a very important role to play in a heart healthy diet.

What should we look for when grocery shopping?

Whatever you pick up, be it baked goods or processed foods, make sure it has zero trans fat. Trans fat has a straight impact on the triglyceride levels in your body. Also, look out for foods that have different varieties of whole grains; multigrain breads or porridge. Today, we've become hardcore rice eaters, whereas, traditionally, people used to consume different kinds of millets like , bajra, Indian corn, ragi and so on.



Including a combination of the above mentioned millets in your diet is very good. Resorting to red rice instead of white is a simple step one can take while shopping for heart healthy groceries.

What about fats in foods? Don't we need some fat in our diet?

We need about 15-20% of fats every day. Rice, vegetables and even dhal have fat; it is the proportion that varies in each of these ingredients. Taking these natural fats instead of making it unnaturally fat by cooking it in plenty of oil, butter or cheese is when the problem arises. For an average adult, consumption of half kilo of oil is sufficient for a whole month. However, on an average a 4 member family consumes 6 liters of oil a month, which is very unhealthy. Hence, these are small lifestyle changes we have to make in order to avoid heart diseases.

What do nutrition labels really mean?

Nutrition labels give you a bird's eye view of what the product contains. We are still in the nascent stages of nutrition labeling and we have made it compulsory; we still have a long way to go. If we take a 100 gram packet of biscuit, the brands give the nutritive value for the 100 grams. The packet may contain eleven or twelve biscuits. It is necessary that they mention it on a per serving basis, which lacks in many brands today.

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Does heart-healthy eating mean no snacks or desserts?

Not at all. If you watch the quantity and the proportion of fat in what you eat, you are definitely allowed to consume snacks and desserts. Most sweets have saturated fat, which we have to avoid. Instead of having a chocolate cake which has layers of chocolate and fresh cream, it is better if you have a tea cake. Earlier, people used to make kheer with dhal and jaggery, which is in fact healthy and still sweet. As with snacks, going for roasted items like puffed rice instead of fried items is always better. When the oil is reused or heated beyond a certain temperature, trans fats come into picture and that's not a good thing. So, it all depends on the quantity and what kind of snacks you choose to eat. Be smart about what you eat.

What are the best cooking methods for a healthy heart?

Any cooking method is allowed except to restrict deep and shallow fry. Many people think it is better to eat dosa than poori, since the latter is dipped in oil. If the cook is using a few table spoons of oil to make the dosa, it is going to have much more oil than one piece of poori. Whereas when it comes to poori, how much ever we immerse in the oil, it is only going to absorb a certain amount of oil depending on the moisture. So, it all really depends on the cook whether dosai can be made without any oil or made with a katori of oil!

Are there any foods that should never be eaten?

None. If you want to eat cheese and you try and fit it in the saturated fat category, you are good to go. Besides, you can eat foods that have saturated fat once in a while. The problem arises when you go overboard. If we regularly dial in junk foods which are rich only in two nutrients fat and carbohydrates, then we need to cut down. But treating yourself once in a way to these junk foods is ok.

Do you have any suggestions to help make the transition to heart-healthy foods easier?

The American Dietetic Association prescribes five servings of fruits and vegetables a day and we've adapted the same in India. However, most of us don't even cross three servings. There are any number of fruits and vegetables available in the market today and it is important that you choose them wisely. Starchy vegetables or fruits such as mango and jackfruit shouldn't be consumed much. Whereas eating a bowl of salad with lots of lettuce, cucumber and other leafy vegetables is extremely good considering some of these salads have fewer calories in them. Also, one must avoid using high fat salad dressing as they completely change the nutritive value of the vegetables by increasing the fat content. A healthy homemade soup is a good option too. It has a lot of fiber and is devoid of corn flour or

any thickening agent, which are normally used in instant soups. Hence, if you make sure you eat five servings of vegetables and fruits a day in any form, you are definitely not running at a risk of getting heart diseases.

Is it true that reducing the sodium intake helps reducing heart related diseases?

There are different kinds of heart diseases. All this while, we were talking about atherosclerosis, which is a condition where an artery wall thickens because of the collection of fats or cholesterol. This condition is a direct outcome of your diet. The other kind of heart disease is the one that results from a high blood pressure. To avoid high blood pressure, one has to definitely control his sodium intake. The heart can also sometimes malfunction, which results in a lot of water retention in the body. Such people should always keep a watch on their sodium intake. Today we've moved into the convenient food era in the name of lifestyle. The foods that fall under this category have plenty of sodium because they all have preservatives. Sodium doesn't mean just salt; all the baked items have baking powder, which again has a heavy component of sodium. A test was done to differentiate homemade soup and instant soup and the latter had 5 to 20 times more sodium than the former per serving of soup. If manufacturers reduce the amount of sodium and increase the fiber content of soups, it would be fantastic.

A little on good cholesterol and bad cholesterol.

HDL, High-density lipoprotein is the good cholesterol. LDL, Low-density lipoprotein is the bad cholesterol. LDL and VLDL (very low density lipoprotein) creates a block in the arteries and HDL removes the block from the arteries. There is no such thing as no cholesterol. Everybody should have a certain amount of cholesterol in their body. The increase in HDL levels in your body will prevent heart diseases related to atherosclerosis. Foods that raise HDL cholesterol include omega-3 acids, which are found in fish, cold-pressed flaxseed oil, safflower oil, sun flower oil, canola oil, dark green vegetables and the traditional oils like gingelly or til oil.



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