



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

February 2025 Nutrition Celebrating American Heart Month for Older Adults

February not only celebrates love on Valentine's Day but also highlights heart health awareness, especially for older adults. Maintaining heart health is crucial for seniors' overall well-being and longevity. American Heart Month is a perfect time to evaluate daily habits and make small adjustments for lasting benefits. Prioritizing heart health can significantly improve life by employing positive changes, minimizing risks through diet and exercise, reducing stress, and avoiding harmful habits. It's never too late. Here are some tips and strategies to help get you started.

Look at the Stats

According to the American Heart Association, the 2025 stats for older Americans and cardiovascular diseases continue to show heart diseases as the top cause of death for older adults. Their [fact sheet](https://heart.org/en/about-us/heart-and-stroke-association-statistics) (found at heart.org/en/about-us/heart-and-stroke-association-statistics) reveals that cardiovascular disease affects over 75% of those aged 60 to 79, and over 85% of those aged 80+. High blood pressure, a leading risk factor for heart attack and stroke, impacts over 70% of those aged 65 to 74, and over 80% of elders 75+. Additionally, heart failure, stroke, and coronary heart disease remain significant concerns. The total annual costs for cardiovascular disease and stroke for patients 65 and older exceed \$174 billion.

Preventing Heart Diseases with Nutrition

Nutrition has become quite confusing over the last few decades. What was once intuitive is now contradictory and frustratingly confusing due to varying advice from health professionals, trusted providers, and the health industry. This isn't working. The CDC reports three out of four Americans suffer from preventable chronic diseases. The solution is wholesome, clean, and balanced food. With 60% of the standard American diet being ultra-processed (aka: not clean and wholesome), it's important to seek REAL food from all five food groups, as per the [Dietary Guidelines \(DGAs\) for Older Adults](#) (found at [Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025 and Online Materials | Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#)).

Real foods with natural dietary fiber — like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and quality proteins, and dairy — ARE what help to prevent and manage chronic disease. Ensure what you buy is "nutrient-dense," minimizing synthetics and additives. Look at the ingredient lists to determine the quality of the foods you're buying, and remember: ALL REAL FOOD IS HEALTHY. It's just about ensuring you're eating a balance that helps support your heart.

The Role of Added Sweeteners in Affecting Heart Disease Risk

Food manufacturers use more than 61 types of added sugars in their food products. While six to nine teaspoons of sugar per day is recommended, the average American consumes more than 22 teaspoons per day. Excessive sugar intake increases inflammation and heart disease risk.

Most labels now separate natural and added sugars: 4 grams = 1 teaspoon. FDA-approved synthetic substitutes listed in the ingredient list are not included in added-sugar grams. These sugar substitutes make the product technically "sugar-free," but they can cause their own host of digestive and inflammatory issues. Bottom line: Instead of substituting real sugars with fake sugars, stay within the recommendations by checking the amount ingredients. Don't hesitate to add your own natural sugars, like pure maple syrup or honey, if you want to add a little sweetness.

Other Factors to Consider in Keeping Your Heart Healthy

Recognizing risk factors for heart diseases is the first step in maintaining heart health. Age, family history, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and lifestyle choices, like tobacco use and sedentary habits, all contribute to heart health risks. We've talked above about how nutrition plays a crucial role in heart health, but other factors like regular physical activity, monitoring and managing health conditions, reducing stress, and limiting alcohol, all contribute to how healthy your heart is. Older adults can significantly improve their lives by understanding risks, eating a balanced and wholesome diet, staying active, managing conditions, employing stress-management techniques, and avoiding harmful habits.

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RECEIPE OF THE MONTH

Lentil and Sausage Soup

Eating a heart-healthy diet is simple when you focus on whole, minimally processed foods from a variety of food groups. This delicious and easy lentil sausage soup recipe is packed with fiber and flavorful ingredients. It is perfect for leftovers or freezing for future meals. Enjoy!

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pound Italian sausage
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 large carrot, chopped
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 1-2 cloves of garlic, chopped or minced
- 1 cup of lentils (whichever type of lentils you prefer)
- 4 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 1, 14.5-ounce can diced tomatoes
- Salt and pepper to taste

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In a large soup pot, cook the sausage until cooked through.
2. Add the chopped onion, carrot, celery, and garlic.
3. Cover the pot and let cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Add lentils and mix.
5. Add the broth, tomatoes, salt, and pepper and mix.
6. Bring to a boil with lid off.
7. Let boil for one minute and then turn down to a simmer, leaving lid askew to let steam escape.
8. Let simmer for about 30 minutes and enjoy!

