

... FEBRUARY 2010 ...

QUICK TAKES

CHOLESTEROL LEVELS

Total Cholesterol

Total cholesterol includes your LDL, HDL and all other lipoproteins. A desirable level is less than 200 mg/dL.

Low-Density Lipoprotein (LDL)

LDL is considered the "bad" cholesterol because it transports cholesterol through the body and can build up in the artery walls. An optimal LDL reading is less than 100 mg/dL (less than 70 if you have already have heart disease or are at very high risk). The higher your LDL count, the greater your risk of heart attack.

High-Density Lipoprotein (HDL)

HDL is considered the "good" cholesterol because it can reduce your risk of heart disease by transporting cholesterol away from arteries and to the liver, where it becomes harmless. A desired level is 40 mg/dL for men and 50 mg/dL for women.

Triglycerides

Triglycerides are another type of fat in the blood. Hormones regulate the release of these fats to meet the body's energy needs between meals. High levels can increase your risk for heart disease. A desirable level is less than 150 mg/dL.

"Superfoods" vs. Heart Disease

While all foods provide calories and some nutrition, scientists in recent years have identified some "superfoods" which appear to do much more. These foods not only nourish you, but work with your body to improve your health and prevent common diseases, including heart disease. These "superfoods" harness the power of phytochemicals in fruits, vegetables, beans and whole grains.

Fruits and Vegetables

Fruits and vegetables are great for heart health, which we now know is affected by some of the same oxidation processes involved in aging and cancer. If you thought heart disease was only about cholesterol, you are behind the times. A 2003 report from the UCLA School of Medicine showed that the phytochemical lutein, which helps prevent blindness, also reduces the process of atherosclerosis or narrowing of the arteries by about 15 percent. Lutein-rich spinach is also a good source of folic acid, which has been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease when homocysteine levels are high – common in individuals who have a family history of heart disease. Garlic is another superfood. It has been known for centuries to be good for blood pressure and the heart. Eating one or two cloves a day in foods can help. To get the phytochemicals you need, eat one fruit or vegetable from each of seven color groups (Red, Green, Yellow/Green, Orange, Orange/Yellow, Red/Purple and White/Green) every day:

RED: Tomatoes, tomato juice, tomato soup, watermelon, pink grapefruit

GREEN: Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage

YELLOW/GREEN: Spinach, avocado, kale, collard greens

ORANGE: Carrots, butternut squash, pumpkin

YELLOW/ORANGE: Oranges, pineapple, banana, cantaloupe

WHITE/GREEN: Garlic, onions, chives

RED/PURPLE: Blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, red wine



Each color provides unique substances, and eating one from each group every day makes the most of their protective, nutritional properties. Another benefit: Fruits and vegetables fill you up on fewer calories.

Whole Grains

If you have slightly high cholesterol – a reading of 200 to 240 – you have company. About 57 million Americans have high cholesterol. Foods with soluble fibers, including whole grains such as oatmeal and soy cereals, can bring cholesterol numbers down. Your body wants 25 to 35 grams of fiber per day, but most Americans manage to eat just 10 to 15 grams. Whole grains, along with fruits and vegetables, help you reach the desired goal. Fiber reduces cholesterol, fills you up and helps you maintain your weight.

Protein

The next superfoods are rich sources of protein, especially soy. While all proteins have amino acids as their building blocks, some protein foods, such as red meat, are very high in fat and calories. Soy, including soy meat substitutes, is a better bet for the same quality of protein.

The Stress/Heart Connection

When you think of the stereotypical heart attack candidate, you may well picture an overachieving executive who's always on the go, furiously barking orders at subordinates. But does chronic stress really cause cardiac episodes? Is the average person who's overworked, overscheduled and sometimes emotionally overwhelmed at risk for cardiovascular disease? Find out how stress may be affecting your heart and what you can do to manage it.

Effects of Stress

Certainly, as anyone who's ever overslept an alarm knows, a stressful experience can get your chest pounding. "Stress can have damaging effects to your heart and blood vessels," said Lori Mosca, M.D., Ph.D., author of *Heart to Heart: A Personal Plan for Creating a Heart-Healthy Family*. "Your body releases hormones in response to stress that increase your heart rate, and that demand on your heart can constrict your blood vessels."

But the long-term effects of a stressful lifestyle are still being examined. "The American Heart Association and other agencies have not yet designated stress or emotional factors as major risk factors for heart disease, because the studies are not that conclusive yet," said Dr. Gerald Fletcher, cardiologist at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Fla. In research, it's difficult to isolate stress from its attendant unhealthy behaviors. "The stressed person is often times also a person who has other risk factors for heart disease," Fletcher said. In other words, that executive's behavior (three-martini lunches, chain-smoking and unused gym membership) might put him at risk for heart disease, so it's hard to know the effects of his high-stress lifestyle.

Negative Emotions and the Heart

Yet, gradually, scientists are piecing together clues about the demonstrated links between stress and heart disease. A 2004 Duke University study of coronary artery disease patients found a link between exposure to negative emotions and the body's ability to control heart rate. Researchers tracked the electrical activity of individuals for two days with portable electrocardiogram machines. "Monitors showed that during periods of mental stress and negative emotions, the hearts showed a reduced capacity to respond," said Duke researcher Dr. Simon Bacon. This potential might explain how chronic stress, left unchecked, contributes to heart disease risk.

So, your fast-paced job is not a proven health hazard. But if you're concerned about maintaining a healthy heart, stress management is clearly an important part of the big picture. Now, how do you get started? First, look at what's stressing you out, and think about how you might lighten the load. "I believe we can actually prevent a lot of the stress that we have in our lives," Mosca said. "We underestimate a lot of the control that we do have over our lives and our schedule." Adjusting your attitude might mean the difference between hyperventilating when something goes wrong and just laughing it off.

Of course, as Fletcher says, "we'll never be able to totally rid ourselves of the stress of American society." But by becoming aware of your own response to stress, you can control it rather than letting it control you.

Lemon-Broiled Salmon with Lentils Takes: 30-60 minutes | Makes: 4 servings

Ingredients

¾ cup green or brown lentils
2 teaspoons olive oil, plus more for brushing
1 small onion, chopped
1 carrot, peeled and cut diced
3 cups low-sodium vegetable or chicken broth
2 tablespoons mirin (Japanese seasoning wine),
sweet vermouth or orange juice
½ teaspoon salt
Freshly ground black pepper
4 small center-cut pieces salmon fillet,
about 4 ounces each
1 lemon, cut into wedges

Preparation

1. Pick over lentils to remove any small stones or broken lentils.
2. Heat olive oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Cook onion and carrot until soft, about 5 minutes. Add broth, mirin (or vermouth or orange juice), salt and a grinding of pepper. Bring the liquid to a boil and stir in the lentils. Cover and cook until the lentils are tender, about 20 minutes.
3. While the lentils are cooking, preheat the broiler. Brush the broiler pan with olive oil. Place salmon fillets on the pan and brush them with a little olive oil. Squeeze 1 or 2 of the lemon wedges over the fillets and season with a generous grinding of pepper. Broil fish for 8 to 10 minutes, until cooked through.



Nutritional info / serving

326 calories
10 g fat
1.7 g saturated fat
30 g protein
36 g carbohydrate