



Heart Food

15 Superfoods Your Heart Will Love



By Ocean Robbins





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Heart disease kills more people than any other disease on Earth.

High blood pressure, stroke, atherosclerosis, arrhythmia, heart attack, heart failure, and cardiovascular disease are causing suffering to hundreds of millions of families.

The good news is that MOST heart disease can be prevented, and even reversed, when you make the right diet and lifestyle choices (and say “no” to the wrong ones!).



We now know the importance of lifestyle factors like diet in the prevention and reversal of heart disease. What are the best heart healthy foods? And what other factors contribute to heart disease? Read on to find out!

Do you know anyone, perhaps a friend or family member (or maybe even yourself), who has had a heart attack?

Chances are you do. According to the American Heart Association's 2018 Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics, [about](#) 92 million American adults are living with cardiovascular disease.

And every 40 seconds, a heart attack [occurs](#) in the U.S. alone.

Heart disease has become a global epidemic. It's the #1 cause of death on the planet.

It's affected my family, too. I never got to know my great-uncle, Burt Baskin, because he died of a heart attack six years before I was born.

How Heart Disease Affected My Family

You see, my great-uncle Burt was one half of the ice-cream company, Baskin-Robbins. And the other half was my grandpa, Irvine Robbins.

Can you guess what they ate their fair share of daily?

We're now pretty clear that ice cream is not a health food. But in the 1950s and 60s, my grandpa and his brother-in-law were pumping out delicious flavors by the dozen.

Eventually, my grandfather began suffering from a host of health problems, including heart disease. His doctor told him he likely only had a few years of life left.

But his cardiologist recommended changing his diet and handed him a copy of my dad's book, [Diet for a New America](#). And then, **Grandpa Irv started to turn his health around.**

(My dad had walked away from the family company and ice cream fortune. And he followed his own "rocky road" and became a globally recognized health authority. And now one of his readers was none other than my Grandpa Irv!)

Remarkably, my grandpa started eating fewer processed foods and less meat. He gave up sugar and, amazingly, he even gave up ice cream. He started eating a lot more veggies, fruits, and whole foods.

And he got results.

Before long, **Grandpa Irv lost 30 pounds. He ditched all his diabetes and blood-pressure medications. And he enjoyed more energy than he'd had in decades.**

Despite the grim prognosis, he ended up living 19 more healthy years.

So what did I learn from my great-uncle Burt and Grandpa Irv's heart disease?

The Standard American Diet leads to the Standard American diseases. And if you want to turn it all around, *diet is at the heart of the matter.*

What is Heart Disease?

Heart attacks aren't the only form of heart disease (or cardiovascular disease).

Heart disease affects not just the heart but the blood vessels and arteries as well.

There are many [types](#) of heart disease. Heart disease is a general term used to describe dysfunction of the blood vessels in various parts of the body that lead to organ dysfunction.

The most common are:

- **Atherosclerosis** — the hardening and narrowing of the arteries due to a buildup of fat and cholesterol;
- **Arrhythmia** — abnormal heart rhythm;
- **Heart attack** — when a clot blocks blood flow to the heart;
- **Heart valve problems** — such as stenosis or prolapse;
- And **heart failure** — when the heart isn't pumping as much blood as it should.

What Factors Contribute to Heart Disease?

Certain lifestyle factors can increase your risk dramatically.

Smoking, type 2 diabetes, a sedentary lifestyle, obesity, excessive alcohol consumption, and poor diet can all [contribute](#) to the development of heart problems.

That last one is especially important.

What's Being Done About Heart Disease?

While genetics are often emphasized as a major risk factor for heart disease, they're only one possible piece of the puzzle.

In fact, the most common heart disease-related gene called heterozygous familial hypercholesterolemia (basically inherited high cholesterol) only occurs in about one out of 250 people.

But studies have [shown](#) that even in these cases, **cardiovascular disease can still be prevented through simple lifestyle changes.**

As the saying goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," and a 2012 study [found](#) just that.

The study, published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* showed that **preventative measures relating to heart disease were more cost-effective than treatments, especially when it came to [high blood pressure](#).**

However, we still have a long way to go.

Heart disease drugs are prescribed more often than dietary changes. In 2018, the global cardiovascular drug market was [worth](#) over \$47 billion, and is expected to reach nearly \$64 billion by 2026.

And according to the [CDC Foundation](#), at least one out of every six healthcare dollars spent in the United States is spent on cardiovascular disease.

In fact, in the next generation, the costs of heart disease are expected to increase to \$749 billion per year. That's nearly half the GDP of the entire country of Canada!

Any way you slice it, that's a LOT of money being spent on something that could be remedied simply by changing our diets and making other lifestyle changes.

Why Diet Matters a Great Deal for Heart Health

A growing and, frankly, overwhelming body of evidence now tells us that **diet can be absolutely critical to preventing and even reversing heart disease.**

And not just any diet. Studies by some of our Food Revolution Summit speakers including Dean Ornish, MD, Caldwell Esselstyn Jr., MD, and Joel Fuhrman, MD, have shown dramatic results.

These and other studies have shown how **eating a plant-based diet, often combined with regular exercise and a healthy lifestyle, can reduce cardiovascular disease:**

- Dr. Ornish's 1990 Lifestyle Heart Trial [saw](#) an 82% reduction in coronary atherosclerosis after only one year on a plant-based diet, without the use of statins or cholesterol-lowering drugs.
- Similarly, Dr. Esselstyn [conducted](#) a study at Cleveland Clinic, beginning in 1985. Of the 22 patients in the original study, all of whom suffered from severe heart disease, 17 stuck to the diet and stopped the progression of disease, and four experienced a complete reversal.
- And last year, Dr. Fuhrman [published](#) a study which found that when participants ate his "[Nutritarian](#)" diet, they experienced weight loss, reduction in blood pressure, and lower LDL ("bad" cholesterol) levels and triglycerides.



What's the Best Diet for Heart Health?

Many people are confused by all the different dietary advice we hear about. But here's the truth: Leading nutritional experts are in general agreement about [the most heart-healthy diet for humans](#).

We now have an overwhelming body of data that makes it pretty clear:

The optimal diet for heart health is one that is low in animal products (and especially processed meats), low in sugar and processed foods, and high in vegetables and other whole plant foods.

This Way of Eating Is Also Best for Preventing Other Diseases

It turns out this same diet is also generally best for preventing [cancer](#), [type 2 diabetes](#), [obesity](#), and many of the other major health ailments of our times.

In fact, in 2017, medical researchers conducted a meta-analysis study published in the *International Journal of Epidemiology*.

They found that an estimated six to nine million premature deaths (including heart disease and cancer) worldwide in 2013 may have been associated with low fruit and vegetable intake.

Millions of lives (and billions of dollars) could be saved every year if we all just ate more plants. I'd call that a win-win!



15 Foods for Heart Health (Show Your Heart Some Love!)

Now you know how important diet is for heart health. So **what are the specific foods you should be eating if you want to support your heart health?**

1) Berries



Berries, especially the red and [blue](#) varieties, are remarkably potent, heart-healthy warriors.

Results of a meta-analysis study from 2016 [found](#) that berry consumption contributed to lower LDL (bad) cholesterol, blood pressure, and body mass index.

Simply consuming **1 to 2 daily portions of either strawberries, raspberries or blueberries can [reduce](#) your risk of cardiovascular disease.**

2) Leafy Greens



Famous spinach-lover, Popeye the Sailor, didn't just get outwardly strong from eating his greens. He was unknowingly strengthening the most important muscle in his body: his heart!

[Leafy greens](#), such as spinach, collards, kale, beet greens, and dandelion greens contain an abundance of vitamin K, which [helps](#) decalcify blood vessels and protects the arteries.

A meta-analysis study, published in *JRSM Cardiovascular Disease*, showed a **16% decrease in heart disease from a diet rich in leafy greens.**

To put that in context — a 16% reduction in heart disease deaths would save the lives of more than 97,000 people each year in the United States alone. So I say, “Bring on the greens!”

What's the best way to eat leafy greens?

For best results, enjoy a combination of [raw and cooked](#) leafy greens for maximum nutritional benefits.

3) Avocados



Did you know that [avocados](#) have even more potassium than bananas? A single Hass avocado [contains](#) 33% of the daily recommended potassium intake.

Potassium [increases](#) nitric oxide release, lowering blood pressure and improving the function of your arteries.

Avocados also contain healthy monounsaturated fats, which can [reduce](#) LDL cholesterol and overall cardiovascular disease risk.

4) & 5) Nuts & Seeds



[Nut](#) and [peanut butter](#) consumption can protect your heart in a number of ways. (Note: Botanically-speaking, peanuts aren't nuts. They're legumes. But they're used like nuts.)

They've been shown to **lower LDL cholesterol levels, [reduce](#) the risk of inflammation, [decrease](#) body weight and insulin resistance, and improve endothelial function.**

Walnuts, in particular, have been extensively [studied](#) for their positive effect on LDL cholesterol. Part of the reason may have to do with their high amounts of omega-3 fatty acids.

[Flax](#) and [chia seeds](#) are also rich in healthy fats and are two of the [best sources](#) of plant-based omega-3's, namely ALA — an essential fatty acid we can only get from food.

How many nuts and seeds should you eat?

One daily serving of nuts can [reduce your risk](#) of cardiovascular death by **39%.** But, a little goes a long way with nuts and seeds due to their calorie density.

Dr. Joel Fuhrman [recommends](#) 1-2 ounces of nuts and seeds per day (or more if you're fit).

6) Dark Chocolate



Discovered over 2,000 years ago in Central and South America, the Latin name of the cacao tree, *Theobroma cacao*, [means](#) “food of the gods.” And it’s easy to see why.

The antioxidants derived from the cacao tree, found in cocoa powder and dark chocolate, are [more powerful](#) even than “superfruits” like blueberries, acai, cranberry, and [pomegranate](#).

One study even [showed](#) that **high levels of dark chocolate consumption reduced cardiovascular disease by 37%**, type 2 diabetes by 31%, and stroke by 29%. Those are pretty significant numbers!

How to choose the best chocolate:

But even for all its [benefits](#), *keep in mind that most chocolate contains large amounts of sugar and [dairy](#)*, which can mitigate its benefits.

When it comes to your health, darker is better, so look for varieties that contain at least 72% cocoa. And as with many tropical foods, sourcing matters too. To avoid supporting [farmer exploitation](#) and child labor, *I always encourage fair-trade-certified cocoa*.

7) Beans



As a child, you may have heard the schoolyard song about beans being good for your heart. Little did you know, there’s actually some truth to that!

Beans are high in a variety of *vitamins, minerals, and fiber*, making them **a top heart-healthy food**.

Beans also [contain](#) phytochemicals that *reduce inflammation and oxidative stress* caused by a buildup of plaque and clogging of the arteries.

Darker colored beans, such as adzuki beans and black beans, have the highest levels of phytochemicals. But all kinds of beans are highly nutritious and are excellent foods for heart health.

Add them to soups and salads or prepare them as a main course with steamed veggies.

Just one serving of beans per day can reduce your risk of heart attack by 38%, [according](#) to a 2005 study.

8) Tomatoes



[Tomatoes](#) are a rich source of lycopene, an [antioxidant](#) and carotenoid that gives them their red color.

As an antioxidant, lycopene can **lower inflammation in your body and prevent oxidative stress that contributes to heart disease.**

What's the best way to eat tomatoes?

Eating raw tomatoes was [shown](#) to increase HDL (the good cholesterol) in overweight women. But cooking tomatoes actually [increases](#) their nutritional benefits, releasing even more lycopene than what's available in their raw state.

Try including cooked tomatoes in stews, chilis, and stir-fries or as a topping on zucchini or butternut squash noodles.

9) Apples



An [apple](#) a day may keep the cardiologist away. But why exactly is that?

Apples contain pectin, a soluble fiber that blocks cholesterol absorption in your gut.

Like beans, they also have polyphenols and other antioxidants that fight heart disease by lowering blood pressure and cholesterol.

One study [concluded](#) that **apples could be almost as effective at preventing heart disease deaths as statins, or cholesterol-lowering drugs.**

Apples are a beneficial addition to any heart-healthy diet.

What's the best way to eat apples?

They're best eaten with the skin on because the skin provides most of the fiber and many of the other beneficial nutrients, too.

Many Spices Are Also Heart-Healthy

Low in calories and relatively inexpensive, [spices](#) are used around the world in every culture for their flavors and medicinal benefits.

Indian spices, in particular, have been [shown](#) to **protect against inflammation and damage caused by high cholesterol and blood sugar and to be protective against heart disease.**

10) Garlic



Part of the [allium](#) family of vegetables, garlic has been used for centuries in cooking and medicine.

Charaka, the father of Ayurvedic medicine, claimed that garlic maintains blood flow and strengthens the heart.

Evidence exists from the National Health and Medical Research Council that ½ to a whole clove of garlic daily could [lower blood cholesterol levels by up to 9%.](#)

Garlic extract has also shown anti-clotting and blood-pressure-lowering properties in studies.

11) Turmeric



A major ingredient in Indian curries, the health benefits of [turmeric](#) are far-reaching due to a powerful polyphenol called curcumin.

Curcumin is what gives turmeric its yellow color. And it also has a protective role against cardiovascular disease.

The antioxidant effects of curcumin can [prevent heart-related complications due to diabetes, lower LDL cholesterol levels, protect against atherosclerosis, and prevent heart failure and arrhythmias.](#)

(To find out how turmeric can help you hack your genetics and avoid disease, [click here.](#))

12) Ginger



A widely used medicinal spice, [ginger](#) is useful in treating a variety of chronic conditions, including heart disease.

Ginger's active component, gingerol, has powerful anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects.

In one study, mice who [consumed](#) a high dose of ginger extract for 10 weeks experienced a **76% reduction in cellular cholesterol**. (Our view on the use of animals in medical research is [here](#).)

Another study with humans who took a 10 gram, one-time dose of dried ginger, [saw](#) a **reduction in the formation of blood clots**.

13) Black Pepper



Considered the “king of spices,” black pepper is rich in minerals including potassium, which **helps control heart rate and blood pressure** – and zinc, an antioxidant with **anti-inflammatory** properties.

It's also a rich source of magnesium, which **helps keep blood flow and blood vessels in tip-top shape**.

One study [found](#) that supplementation of black pepper in a high-fat diet increased HDL (good) and reduced LDL (bad) cholesterol levels, and reduced triglyceride levels.

14) Cinnamon



Although today we associate cinnamon with foods like apple pie, its culinary and medicinal history goes back thousands of years. Arab traders brought it to Europe in limited supplies where the then expensive spice was [considered](#) a status symbol during the Middle Ages.

Cinnamon is [documented](#) in both *Indian Materia Medica* and *Indian Medicinal Plants – A Compendium of 500 species* books, classifying the spice as **an herbal drug with cardiovascular benefits**.

In recent studies, cinnamon has been [shown](#) to help manage obesity-related high cholesterol while also increasing nitric-oxide levels.

15) Coriander



Coriander has a long and well-documented history as a treatment for cholesterol.

The seeds of coriander are especially good at **lowering cholesterol**, which has been documented in a few different studies.

One study on rats [showed](#) a significant decrease in total cholesterol and triglycerides while HDL (good) cholesterol levels increased. Another study using coriander and curry leaves [found](#) they help **prevent blood clots caused by heart disease**.

Let Food Be Thy Medicine

Many of the foods mentioned here aren't only good for heart health. They're also beneficial in fighting other diseases and chronic conditions, such as cancer, type 2 diabetes, and Alzheimer's.

Want to show your heart, and your whole body, some love? Try loving the foods that will love you back.

Bon appetit!



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