

[IMAGE]

## 5 Simple Food Substitutions to Improve Your Heart Health

By Editorial Staff

Heart health is a significant topic these days for two simple reasons: First, increasing evidence suggests that our poor dietary choices – particularly the Standard American Diet (SAD), characterized by heavy intake of processed, fatty, calorie-laden, fiber- and nutrient-deficient foods – puts us at major risk for heart disease; and second, evidence also suggests wise dietary choices can protect the heart from disease, keeping it healthy as we age.

Case in point: A recent study that examined the heart-health benefits of the Mediterranean diet. According to study findings, people at higher-than-normal risk for cardiovascular disease reduced their risk simply by consuming a diet high in whole grains, nuts, seeds, olive oil, fruits and vegetables, and fish, and low in dairy, red meat, processed meats and sugary foods.

Specifically, eating the Mediterranean diet supplemented with extra olive oil or extra mixed nuts reduced study participants' risk of suffering a heart attack or stroke, or dying of cardiovascular disease, by nearly 30 percent compared to a control group, whose only dietary modifications were based on a general recommendation to reduce dietary fat intake. Results were similar when the two Mediterranean diets were combined and compared to the control diet.

heart health - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Here are five easy ways to follow the principles of the Mediterranean diet and improve your heart health starting today, courtesy of the Mayo Clinic ([www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)):

1. Think plant-based meals: fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes (beans) and nuts / seeds.
2. Instead of adding salt to your favorite meals, substitute herbs and spices to give your meals punch without the sodium content.
3. Eat no more than 1-2 servings of red meat per month, and eat at least two servings of poultry and fish (preferably wild, not farmed) a week.
4. Replace butter with "good" oils (olive, canola, etc.), which are high in monounsaturated fat, helping clear cholesterol from the body.

5. Limit dairy intake and choose low-fat / fat-free options when it comes to milk, cheese and yogurt. That way, you can enjoy some of the health benefits of dairy (calcium, protein, healthy bacteria) without the high fat / cholesterol.

The key principles of the Mediterranean diet make perfect sense considering what we know about food intake and health, and they're all great for your heart – and by the way, great for your entire body. To learn more about the Mediterranean diet and how a healthy diet can benefit not only heart health, but also weight loss and an overall healthy lifestyle, talk to your doctor.

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