

Hot Topic:

HEART HEALTH AND WHOLE GRAINS

What is the relationship between cardiovascular (heart) health and eating whole grains? The links between chronic health conditions and nutrition are the subject of ongoing research.

HEART HEALTH

Coronary heart disease is not one illness, but a constellation of conditions caused by plaque build-up in the artery walls. Plaque in the artery impairs blood flow and prevents the heart and other parts of the body from getting the oxygen-rich blood they need. ¹This can lead to heart attack and stroke.

In addition to the non-modifiable risk factors that increase the risk of developing heart disease (age, gender, ethnicity, genetics), there are also factors that you may be able to address or modify. These include:

- being a smoker
- being overweight
- being sedentary
- drinking excessive amounts of alcohol
- having elevated blood pressure
- having excess cholesterol
- having impaired glucose tolerance and uncontrolled type 2 diabetes²

HEART DISEASE AND DIET

According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, “nutritious, balanced meals and healthy snacks may reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke by helping you increase your intake of heart-healthy nutrients, manage your weight, keep your blood pressure down, control your blood sugar levels and lower your cholesterol.”³

The optimal diet for both the prevention and treatment of heart disease is one that follows Canada’s Food Guide and includes the recommended amounts of:

- vegetables and fruit



Nutritious, balanced meals and healthy snacks may reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke.³

- whole grains
- legumes, nuts and seeds
- healthier fats such as nuts, olive oil and avocado
- fish and other proteins, such as chicken and lean meat
- dairy

These recommendations are based on many years of clinical research, which link the nutrients in those foods (including fibre, omega-3 fat, potassium and antioxidants), with reduced risk of developing chronic diseases.

The diet should also be lower in:

- sugar
- sodium
- saturated and trans fat
- high calorie foods that offer little nutritional value^{4,5}

This eating pattern can help lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, which are two factors that increase heart disease risk.⁶

HEART HEALTH AND WHOLE GRAINS

Whole grains, with their healthy combination of vitamins and minerals have a strong link to heart disease prevention. Here are some studies that highlight the link between heart health and whole grains.

- Several studies consistently showed that people who eat three or more servings of whole grain foods per day have a 20-30 per cent lower risk of cardiovascular disease than subjects who eat fewer whole grains.^{7,8}
- The fibre from whole grains is strongly associated with a reduced risk of heart attack, stroke and death from heart disease. These benefits are likely achieved through multiple pathways, which include reducing weight, waist circumference and body mass index; improving glucose metabolism and insulin sensitivity; and lowering the risk of metabolic syndrome and diabetes.⁹
- A study from the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that daily consumption of three portions of whole-grain foods significantly reduced cardiovascular disease risk in middle-aged people mainly through blood pressure lowering mechanisms. The observed decrease in blood pressure helps decrease the incidence of coronary artery disease and stroke by ≥ 15 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively.¹⁰

Whole grains have a strong link to
heart disease prevention.³



For more information on the link between
heart health and nutrition, visit:
www.HealthyGrains.ca.

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