

I lost a good friend and colleague to heart disease a couple of weeks ago. It's been weighing heavy on my mind. Did you know more than 2500 Americans a day die of this preventable disease? These grim statistics come from the American Heart Association's new report "Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics—2005 Update". Heart disease remains this country's leading cause of death.

A recent report in the 2005 American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that one particular diet reduced LDL (bad) cholesterol almost as effectively as statin drugs. This diet was high in veggies, fiber and soy protein. Another study in the Archives of Internal Medicine (Jan. 2005) has suggested that the quality of fat, not the quantity, could be the key to avoiding heart disease and stroke. Increased intake of omega 3 fatty acids found in fatty fish (such as salmon) and participants who used healthy oils such as olive, canola, corn safflower, soybean and sunflower were 62% less likely to die of heart disease than the controls who ate less fat of any kind. An eating style that has been associated with longevity and lower heart risk is the Mediterranean style of eating. This fits in well with the above studies as it includes fish and lots of vegetables and olive oil!

What is the best way to work these beneficial heart healthy foods into our diets?

First, consider the type of fat in your diet. Are you limiting saturated fat found primarily in fatty cuts of meat, whole milk dairy products and palm and coconut oil in processed foods? How about trans fats which also increase LDL (bad) cholesterol levels? These are found in fried foods, stick margarine and processed foods such as crackers, snack foods and cookies. Watch for the words "partially hydrogenated" on the ingredient label or look to see if trans fat is on the Nutrition Facts label. This will be required information by January 2006 but many products already have it. When you do use fat for cooking or baking, choose monounsaturated oil (such as olive, canola or peanut oil) or polyunsaturated oil (corn, soybean, safflower, sunflower oils). As far as spread able fat, the best choice would be a trans fat free tub margarine. There are also tub margarines on the market which have been shown to reduce LDL cholesterol by an average of 10% (Take Control, Benecol, Smart Balance). These have been fortified with plant stanols or sterols. These spreads can further reduce the LDL cholesterol of an individual already taking a statin drug to lower cholesterol. Keep in mind, whatever type of fat you select, oils and margarine are still a concentrated source of calories.

Fiber is found in fruits, vegetables, breads and cereals, especially whole grains. Legumes (dried peas, beans and lentils) are rich in fiber. (one cup cooked can have 12 or more grams of fiber). Snacks that are good sources of fiber include mixed nuts, sunflower seeds, popcorn, and high fiber cereals. The daily fiber recommendations for women are 25 grams and for men are 38 grams (these drop to 21 and 30, respectively for individuals over 50 years of age). It takes some menu planning and label reading as you shop, but boosting your fiber intake can be very heart healthy!

Research has shown that consuming soy protein, rather than animal protein, can decrease your LDL (bad) cholesterol level. As many of these soy products state, "adding 25 grams of soy protein a day, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may reduce the risk of heart disease". Soy has no saturated fat and no cholesterol and it's an Iowa grown product! Soy products to consider are green soybeans (edamame) tofu, tempeh, miso, soy burgers, textured vegetable protein (found in many vegetarian entrees and products), soy milk, soy nuts, soy flour, soynut butter, soy mayonnaise, soy cheese, soy breakfast cereal and the many "meat substitutions" such as soy sausage, bratwurst, chicken nuggets, etc. Be adventurous! Start slowly. Perhaps begin by using tofu disguised in a smoothie or a dip made with silken tofu. Tofu can replace sour cream and cream cheese in many recipes. It can also be used in place of ricotta cheese in lasagna.

The American Heart Association states that eating at least 2 servings of fish (3 ounces each) per week can lower your risk of heart disease. The reason is believed to be the omega-3 fatty acids found in fish. These are polyunsaturated fats that reduce the risk of heart attack by making the

blood less sticky and less likely to form damaging blood clots. Canned salmon is an economical and easy way to work more omega-3 fatty acids into your diet. Perhaps a grilled salmon burger or salmon patties made in a skillet? (see recipe below) How about making canned salmon into salad with plain nonfat yogurt or low fat mayonnaise and serving it stuffed in a fresh tomato or on salad greens? Or spread the salmon salad on a whole grain bagel and top with low fat cheese for a "Salmon Melt"! Have you considered incorporating canned salmon into a pasta salad which may also include lots of fresh veggies and a light ranch or Italian dressing? And that same canned salmon can be used as stuffing for a baked potato for an easy summer supper (see recipe below). Canned salmon is extremely versatile! (Many of these dishes could also be made with fresh or frozen salmon fillets if you prefer or if you wish to limit sodium intake).

Salmon Stuffed Potatoes

(makes 4 servings)

Serve with a tossed green salad and glass of cold milk for a complete meal!

1 can (7 and 1/2 oz.) salmon
4 baking potatoes
1 cup shredded low fat cheese of choice
¼ cup low fat or nonfat milk
1 egg, beaten
2 Tbsp. trans fat free tub margarine
2 Tbsp. minced onion
2 Tbsp. diced green chilies
1/8 tsp. freshly ground black pepper

Drain and flake salmon. Set aside. Pierce potato skins and bake in oven or microwave (at HIGH for 20 minutes or until tender, turning halfway through). Cut a slice off top of each potato. Scoop out inside, leaving ¼-inch shell. Blend potato pulp with ½ cup cheese, flaked salmon and remaining ingredients. Spoon mixture into potato shells. Bake at 350 degrees or microwave on HIGH power for 4 to 5 minutes until heated through. Sprinkle with remaining cheese and microwave on HIGH power for 45 seconds or until cheese melts.

Salmon Patties/Burgers

(makes 4 large burgers)

1 can (15 and ½ oz.) salmon, drained, skin removed, flaked
½ cup uncooked oatmeal
2 Tbsp. reduced-calorie mayonnaise
½ cup chopped onion
2 egg whites
2 Tbsp. lemon juice
1 Tbsp bottled horseradish or Dijon style mustard

Mix all ingredients and shape into burgers. The mixture may be somewhat crumbly. Coat skillet with cooking spray and add burgers. Cook at medium high heat for 7 to 8 minutes, until the burgers form a nice brown crust. Carefully flip, reduce heat to medium and cook another 5 to 6 minutes until that side also forms a crust. Serve on bun if desired with lettuce, tomato and other condiments as desired. Tasty without bun served with hash browns (cook in olive oil!)

Salmon spread is just a variation of the burgers. Leave out the oatmeal and the egg and add any additional spices you desire (garlic powder is something I usually add). It is tasty on a whole grain cracker or piece of pita bread for an appetizer or even for lunch. It could also be spread on a bagel in the morning instead of cream cheese.

Here is a really quick to make Mediterranean style recipe. Check out the Nutrition Clinic website at www.fcs.iastate.edu/fshn/nutritionclinic for other Mediterranean style and many more healthy recipes! Click on recipes/handouts on left side of screen.

Mediterranean Shrimp and Pasta

Serves 4

8 ounces thin spaghetti (try whole wheat!)

2 cans (14 1/2 ounces each) pasta-style chopped tomatoes or chopped tomatoes flavored with garlic and herbs

1 teaspoon bottled minced garlic or 1 clove fresh garlic, minced

1 pound large shrimp

1/4 cup already-crumbled feta cheese (or grated Parmesan if you prefer)

1. Place the noodles in 2 1/2 quart of already-boiling unsalted water and cook until tender, 10 to 12 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, place the tomatoes and garlic in a 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat. While the tomatoes cook, peel the shrimp. Add them to the skillet and stir well. Cook, stirring from time to time, just until the shrimp are opaque, about 3 to 5 minutes. Remove the skillet from the heat.

3. Drain the noodles, and divide them among 4 plates. Top with sauce and shrimp, and sprinkle 1 tablespoon feta cheese over each serving.

Approximate Values Per Serving: 385 calories (18% from fat), 8 g fat (2 g saturated), 143 mg cholesterol, 25 g protein, 54 g carbohydrates, 4 g dietary fiber, 1,305 mg sodium

Next week I'll give you information on the top 10 cholesterol-fighting foods. In the meantime, stay active, eat healthy and enjoy!

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