

NEAL & DAVIS, PLLC

Attorneys and Counselors at Law
931 Main Street
Post Office Box 40
Shelbyville, Kentucky 40066-0040
www.nealanddavislaw.com

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Good choices for heart-healthy eating

Poor eating habits can increase the risk of heart disease. Over 600,000 people die yearly of heart disease, and it is the nation's leading cause of death. These guidelines will help you make good choices for heart-healthy eating:

Eat vegetables and fruits. They are low in calories and provide important nutrients. Keep fruit handy for an easy, nutritious, low-calorie snack. Add chopped fresh vegetables to salads.

Select whole grains. Whole grain breads and baked goods provide fiber and nutrients that help regulate blood pressure.

Limit sugar. Sweetened drinks and snacks are a major source of added sugar. Avoid products made

with corn syrup, dextrose, fructose or high-fructose corn syrup.

Reduce unhealthy solid fats. Instead of butter, margarine or shortening, use olive oil or canola oil. Avocados, nuts and such cold-water fish as salmon, mackerel and herring are other good sources of healthy fats.

Choose low-fat protein, such as skinless chicken breasts, fish, eggs and lean cuts of meat. Beans, peas and lentils provide low-fat protein with no cholesterol.

Reduce salt intake. Too much salt can contribute to high blood pressure, a risk factor for heart disease. Limit added salt when cooking or eating.

Avoid refined, processed and fast foods containing sugar, salt and unhealthy fats.

Plan ahead. Avoid the temptation of high-calorie, high-fat foods by planning meals for the week, focusing on fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat protein.

Enjoy a treat. Indulging in a "forbidden" food occasionally will not destroy your heart-healthy diet.

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