

# The Medical Minute: Heart-healthy eating over the summer

June 27 2011, By Claude Fanelli and Jan Kristensen

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Summer is here. With it comes hotter temperatures, longer daylight, vacations, backyard grilling, and picnics. Think it's too hard to maintain heart healthy eating habits at the neighborhood picnic? Use the 10 tips below to help you stay on track with heart-healthy eating this summer.

-- Drink water instead of sugary drinks. Water keeps you hydrated with no calories. Drinks like sweetened iced coffee and tea, soda, and lemonade do provide water, but the sugar calories in these drinks might not curb your appetite, making it easy to slurp down extra calories you don't need. Added sugars can also raise blood triglyceride levels.

-- Enjoy locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables. Nothing beats fresh produce picked at the peak of ripeness and flavor. Don't have your own garden? Shop at a roadside stand or farmers' market. Look for locally grown produce at the supermarket. Burn a few extra calories at a 'pick your own produce' farm. Find one at [www.pickyourown.org/PA.htm](http://www.pickyourown.org/PA.htm) .

-- Fill half your plate with vegetables and fruits. Fresh vegetables and fruits help you fill up with vitamins, minerals, and health-promoting phytochemicals (i.e. natural plant compounds), without adding too many calories. Eat a wide variety of types and colors to get the most health benefit. To balance your meals, fill one-quarter of your plate with a lean protein source like fish, skinless poultry, lean meat or legumes and fill the other one-quarter with whole grains. On the side, add a serving of fat-free milk or yogurt. Skip the salt shaker and high-sodium condiments.

-- Try new ways to enjoy vegetables. Grill vegetables as kabobs, in a grill basket, or in foil packets. Add vegetables to whole grain pasta, potato, or meat salads. Create your own simple, colorful combo like shredded yellow squash, zucchini, and carrots with a splash of oil and vinegar. Try fresh herbs for seasoning instead of fatty, salty salad dressings.

-- Satisfy a sweet tooth with frozen fruit instead of high calorie frozen treats. Cut and freeze bite-sized pieces of fruit to eat, slightly thawed, for a snack. Whip up a fruit smoothie with frozen fruit (or fresh fruit and crushed ice), fat free milk or yogurt, flavoring extract like vanilla or coconut, and perhaps a “dash” of sugar or sugar substitute, and drink or make into popsicles.

-- Use fruit in new ways. Add fruit to salsa and all kinds of salads, including leafy green, whole grain, seafood, and chicken salads. Grill peach halves, pineapple slices and other fruit. Add fruit to fat free ricotta cheese or yogurt, pancakes, muffins, and stir-fry dishes.

-- Go meatless for a meal. Make cold bean-based salads for entrees.  
Examples:

-- Hummus (bean dip) eaten with raw veggies and whole grain pita

-- Tabouli salad with chick peas added

-- Whole wheat pasta, vegetable, and white bean salad with vinaigrette dressing

-- Corn, tomato, green pepper, and black bean salad seasoned with fresh cilantro, lime, and salt-free Mexican seasoning blend

-- Slow down and savor smaller portions. Use this tip especially when you want to partake of high-calorie favorites or other foods that you

should limit. Use a smaller plate or glass. Take a half portion or sliver, and eat small bites. Watch out -- small tastes of several favorites can add up quickly if you're not careful.

-- Go easy on the alcohol. Sip slowly. Intersperse with sips of water.

-- Practice safe food handling. Wash hands often before and after handling food. Wash fresh produce before eating. Remember the two hour limit (or one hour limit if 90 degrees Fahrenheit or warmer) for letting perishable food sit out. Use a meat thermometer to assure proper internal [temperature](#) for safe eating. Avoid charring meats to limit production of cancer-causing heterocyclic amines (HCAs). Visit the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service at [www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/s ... act\\_sheets/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/s...act_sheets/index.asp) for more information.

Keep the focus on the positive things you can do to stay healthy and enjoy the [summer](#). Use these tips as often as possible and, before you know it, they will become your new habits for year-round good health!

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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