

Healthy diet may help prevent recurrent heart attacks, strokes

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If you have cardiovascular disease, a heart-healthy diet may help protect you from recurrent heart attacks and strokes, according to new research in the American Heart Association journal *Circulation*.

"At times, patients don't think they need to follow a healthy diet since their medications have already lowered their blood pressure and cholesterol—that is wrong," said Mahshid Dehghan, Ph.D., study author and a nutritionist at the Population Health Research Institute, McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. "Dietary modification has benefits in addition to those seen with aspirin, angiotensin modulators, lipid-lowering agents and beta blockers."

For the study, 31,546 adults (average age 66.5) with cardiovascular disease or end organ damage were asked how often they consumed milk, vegetables, fruits, grains, fish, meat and poultry in the past 12 months. They were also asked about [lifestyle choices](#) such as [alcohol consumption](#), smoking and exercise. Total scores were determined by daily fruits, vegetables, grains and milk consumed and the ratio of fish to meats consumed.

During a follow-up of nearly five years, participants experienced 5,190 cardiovascular events.

Researchers found those who ate a heart-healthy diet had a:

- 35 percent reduction in risk for [cardiovascular death](#);
- 14 percent reduction in risk for new heart attacks;
- 28 percent reduction in risk for [congestive heart failure](#); and
- 19 percent reduction in risk for stroke.

Food habits in different regions of the world varied considerably; however, a healthy diet was associated with prevention of recurrent cardiovascular disease throughout the world in countries with different economic levels, Dehghan said.

A diet rich in [vegetables and fruits](#) with a higher ratio of fish to meats appeared to be more beneficial for preventing heart disease than for preventing cancer, fractures or injury.

"Physicians should advise their high-risk patients to improve their diet and eat more vegetables, fruits, grains and fish," Dehghan said. "This could substantially reduce cardiovascular recurrence beyond drug therapy alone and save lives globally."

Provided by American Heart Association

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