

Young women: Eat more fruits and vegetables now to protect your heart later

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A diet rich in fruits and vegetables for middle-aged adults has been associated with reduced rates of coronary heart disease (CHD), especially in women. Now, research supported by the Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation (MHIF) shows that for women, what you eat in your 20s may be just as important for your middle-aged heart. The results of the study, aimed at examining the extent to which young adults' diets are linked to cardiovascular health later in life, will be presented at the American College of Cardiology (ACC) meeting in Washington, DC on March 29 by the lead author, Michael D Miedema, MD, MPH.

In the study, researchers looked specifically at the relationship between fruit and [vegetable consumption](#) in [early adulthood](#) and the presence of calcium (plaque) build-up in the coronary arteries during middle age. They analyzed data from 2,648 participants (60.8% women) in the Coronary Artery Disease Risk in Young Adults (CARDIA) study.

The results? Young women who ate ~8 servings of fruits/vegetables per day were ~40% less likely to have calcified plaque in their arteries 20 years later, compared with young women who ate only ~3 servings of fruits/vegetables per day. The correlation is strong even after accounting for other dietary factors (like eating red meat, fish, or sugar-sweetened beverages) and traditional risk factors (like smoking and body mass index). This same benefit was not observed for young men.

"Healthy lifestyle behaviors are the foundation for the prevention of heart disease, and atherosclerotic plaque formation, the hallmark of

cardiovascular disease, is a lifelong process," states Miedema. "Our results reinforce the value of establishing healthy behaviors early in adulthood and affirm that population-based approaches to reduce cardiovascular disease should include a focus on establishing a high intake of fruits and vegetables early in life."

Miedema is a preventative cardiologist at the Minneapolis Heart Institute® at Abbott Northwestern Hospital and a research cardiologist with the Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation (MHIF).

Provided by Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation

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