

Improve your



Heart Health

in 7 days

Challenge: Pick any 7 days during the month of February and try out these tips to improve your heart health.

Day 1: Eat These 6 Purple Foods to Help Your Blood Pressure

Day 2: Choose Low-Fat Dairy

Day 3: Go Unrefined

Day 4: Get Your Omega-3's

Day 5: Wash Away Sodium

Day 6: Go Nuts

Day 7: Be Choosy About Your Chocolate

But wait—it's not that easy! Fill out this survey to let us know what you tried, and what you thought!

Challenge Survey:

<https://goo.gl/forms/KNC30gupGKtqvW032>

Hint: Team up with others and do some recipe sharing, pot luck style lunches to try a variety!!



Day 1:

Eat These 6 Purple Foods to Help Your Blood Pressure

Research shows that people who eat blue and purple fruits and vegetables—blueberries, plums, purple cabbage, black currants, eggplant and purple grapes—have a reduced risk for high blood pressure and low HDL cholesterol (that’s the good kind). Scientists believe that anthocyanins, the compounds that give purple foods their color, are responsible for these boons. Blue and purple foods make up only about 3 percent of the average American’s fruit and veggie intake, so aim to eat more. High intakes of flavonoids are associated with reduced cardiovascular risk, and flavonoids such as cocoa and soy protein isolate have shown beneficial effects on blood pressure (BP). Anthocyanins constitute a flavonoid subgroup consumed in regular diets.

Check out these recipe ideas for these 6 purple foods!

Breakfast Blueberry–Oatmeal Cakes

Low–Sugar Plum Spread

Warm Red Cabbage Salad

Black Currant & Mint Sorbet

Eggplant Lasagna Rolls

Chicken, Fennel & Grape Quinoa Salad

Challenge: Try 2 of the recipes above!



Day 2:

Choose Low-Fat Dairy

Dairy products like milk, sour cream and yogurt are a good source of calcium. Replacing whole-milk dairy products with low-fat or nonfat is an easy way to cut saturated fat in your diet. Plus, substituting low-fat dairy for full-fat versions may also help lower blood pressure, according to a 2009 study in the *British Journal of Nutrition*.

Need some ideas?



Challenge: Try 1 low-fat dairy product you've never had before!



Day 3: Go Unrefined

Pick whole grains over refined grains. People who eat more whole grains tend to have lower “bad” LDL cholesterol and higher “good” HDL cholesterol. Plus, because whole grains have their bran intact they have more fiber, B vitamins, magnesium, zinc and other nutrients.

Need some ideas?

Whole Wheat: Can be readily found in bread and pasta products, but make sure the label says “100 percent whole wheat.” Terms like “multigrain” and “wheat” don’t cut it. As when you’re shopping for any whole-grain product, look at the ingredients and make sure the whole grain is at or near the top of the list. Each serving should contain at least 2 or 3 grams of fiber.

Whole Oats: Oats are particularly rich in avenanthramide, an antioxidant that protects the heart. When you’re shopping for this whole grain, whether you see the word “whole” or not doesn’t matter the way it does with wheat products. Oats in the ingredients list mean the product is made from whole oats. But, if you are buying something like instant oatmeal, avoid those that contain high-fructose corn syrup. We suggest sticking to the good old-fashioned unsweetened kind and mixing in a little fruit or honey.

Brown Rice: When you choose white rice over brown, around 75 percent of its nutrients—including nearly all the antioxidants, magnesium, phosphorus, and B vitamins contained in the healthy bran and germ—are left on the milling-room floor. Always opt for brown rice, which includes brown aromatic varieties like basmati and jasmine. Get even more exotic with red and black rice, both of which are considered whole grains and are high in antioxidants. Though technically a grass, wild rice is also considered a whole grain and is rich in B vitamins, such as niacin and folate.

Whole Rye: According to nutritional research, rye has more nutrients per 100-calorie serving than any other whole grain. It has four times more fiber than standard whole wheat and provides you with nearly 50 percent of your daily recommended amount of iron. The problem is, most rye and pumpernickel bread in this country is made with refined flours. Be persistent and look for “whole rye” topping the ingredients list.

Whole Grain Barley: Eating a half-cup of whole barley regularly during a 5-week period can cut cholesterol levels by nearly 10 percent when compared to those who go without barley in a USDA study. Add raisins or dried apricots to quick-cooking barley and serve it as a side dish. Just make sure it’s whole-grain barley, not “pearled,” which means the bran and germ have been removed.

Buckwheat: This common pancake whole grain is one of the whole grains many people living with celiac disease can tolerate (others include quinoa, amaranth, and sorghum). And it’s one of the best grain-based sources of magnesium, a wonder mineral that does everything from ease PMS symptoms to improve nerve functioning; and manganese, which boosts brain power.

Bulgur: For all practical purposes, bulgur is considered a whole grain, even though up to 5 percent of its bran may be removed during processing. The grain, which is used to make tabbouleh salad, is a great source of iron and magnesium. The fiber and protein powerhouse (a cup contains nearly 75 percent of the dietary fiber you need for the day, and 25 percent of the protein you should get) can be used in salads or tossed in soups. And it cooks in only a few minutes.

Quinoa: Though it’s technically a seed and not a grain, this ancient South American power food is packed with more protein than any other grain, and each uncooked cup of the stuff (about three servings) has 522 milligrams of omega-3 fatty acids. Your family will likely enjoy its light, nutty flavor for a change of pace at the dinner table. And it keeps well, so makes an easy make-ahead lunch to pack to work or school.

Whole Wheat Couscous: Most of the couscous you see is a form of pasta, usually made from refined wheat flour. So when you’re eyeing the items in the aisle for the healthiest couscous pick, look for the whole-wheat kind, most easily found in natural-food stores. Skipping the refined version and going with the whole-grain type will gain you 5 additional grams of fiber.

Challenge: Try 2 whole grain products you’ve never had before!



Day 4: Get Your Omega-3s

Eating more omega-3-rich foods, such as fatty fish (salmon, sardines, tuna), canola oil and walnuts, might help you keep your blood pressure down, a recent study suggests. In the multinational INTERMAP study, researchers found that among 4,680 healthy adults, those who consumed the highest amounts of omega-3 fatty acids in their diets had the lowest rates of hypertension—regardless of other factors like salt intake, exercise and alcohol.

Need some ideas?

Seared Salmon with Green Peppercorn Sauce

Chia Chia Pudding

Tuna & Avocado Sweet Potato Toast

Flax Seed Granola Parfait

Challenge:

Try 2 new foods rich in Omega-3's!

	1	SALMON 1.45 g 4 OZ
SARDINES 1.34 g 4 OZ	2	
	3	MACKEREL 1.25 g 4 OZ
GRASS-FED BEEF 1.1 g 4 OZ	4	
	5	FLAX SEED 3.2 g 2 TBSP
CHIA SEEDS 2.5 g 2 TBSP	6	
	7	WALNUTS 2.3 g 1/4 CUP
NATTO 0.52 g 4 OZ	8	
	9	TUNA 0.33 g 4 OZ
GRASS-FED DAIRY 0.25 g 8 OZ	10	



Day 5: Wash Away Sodium

Most of the sodium in our diets—approximately 77%—comes from prepared or processed foods, but sometimes using convenience items, like canned beans and tuna, can make it easier to eat more healthfully. The good news: rinsing those canned foods will remove about 35 percent of their sodium. Also, when choosing processed foods, shop around. Comparing the sodium content for similar foods can save hundreds of milligrams of sodium.

Did you know that a fast food sandwich or burger can easily contains more than 100 percent of the sodium you need in a day? If you're like many Americans, you may be getting way more sodium than your heart can handle. Most people consume about 3,400 milligrams of sodium a day – more than twice the recommended amount by the American Heart Association.

It's easy to understand why. Sodium can be sneaky. It slinks into soups and sandwiches and cozies up to cold cuts and cured meats. It plants itself in your favorite pizza and poultry and burrows into breads and rolls. Learn more about the [Salty Six](#) and better alternatives.

Sodium is an essential nutrient, but you don't need much in your diet. It adds up fast! Take bread, for example. One piece can have up to 230 milligrams of sodium, while a serving of turkey cold cuts can contain as much as 1,050.

The High Blood Pressure Link

Why should sodium be on your radar? About one in three Americans has high blood pressure (or hypertension), and a high-sodium diet may be to blame. In some people, sodium increases blood pressure because it holds excess fluid in the body, creating an added burden on your heart. Too much sodium also increases your risk for stroke, heart failure, osteoporosis, stomach cancer and kidney disease.

Unfortunately, many people have high blood pressure and don't know it. Most of the time, there are no symptoms, which is why it's called the "silent killer." But when high blood pressure goes untreated, it damages arteries and vital organs throughout the body.

Show Sodium Who's Boss

What can you do? Start by tracking your sodium with this [sodium tracker](#). It's an easy way to keep tabs on how much sodium you're getting in your diet. Just jot down what you eat – that blueberry muffin for breakfast, or the garlic bread with last night's spaghetti – and the accompanying sodium stats. ***Remember: Sodium levels vary in the same foods depending on the brand or restaurant.***

At the end of the day it's easy to tally how much sodium you consumed so you can make better choices if needed. Sometimes a small adjustment can bring big results when it comes to your health!

Challenge: Track your sodium intake for the day—stick to the recommendations!



Day 6: Go Nuts

Nuts are chock-full of vitamins, minerals, heart-healthy monounsaturated fats and low levels of saturated fats. Research suggests that people who eat nuts—walnuts, pecans, almonds, hazelnuts, pistachios, pine nuts and peanuts (which actually are legumes)—two to four days or more per week have a lower incidence of heart disease than people who eat them less often.

top10 Ways to Enjoy Nuts

10 Add to Steamed Vegetables. Toss pecans and steamed green beans in a bowl with olive oil and a seasoning blend such as minced garlic and onion with salt, pepper and dried parsley.

9 Add Some Crunch to Your Mornings. Add slivered raw almonds to any of your favorite cereals and enjoy not only the added flavor but enhanced texture as well.

8 Coat Your Proteins. Dredge your meat or fish in a liquid base first (such as lemon juice or olive oil and melted butter) and then cover it in chopped pecans and spices to make your proteins more exciting!

7 Top Your Salads! Chopped walnuts or almonds add flavor and texture to any salad.

6 Stir-Up Your Stir-Fry! Make an Asian-inspired stir-fry using chicken, snow peas, peppers, onion and raw, halved cashews. Toss in some mandarin oranges to add color and flavor!

5 Saucy Sides. Wake up your traditional side dishes! **Try this ...** add some pine nuts to your coleslaw for a different twist on a traditional favorite.

4 Nutty Desserts. Hazelnuts have a delicious flavor and aroma that'll add a whole new element to your cookies or ice cream.

3 Wrap Them Up! Combine chopped almonds with tomato, bell pepper, onion, chopped lettuce and cilantro then lightly toss in a vinaigrette dressing. Warm a wheat tortilla and fill with the ingredients. Add some sliced avocado and you've got yourself a delicious, healthy lunch!

2 Perfect Pate! After soaking walnuts in water for 6-8 hours, chop them up in a food processor along with some parsley, onion, garlic, lemon juice and olive oil for a tasty spread to top whole-wheat crackers or flat-bread.

1 Trail Mix, Naturally! Making a trail mix is a healthy and easy way to have a snack on the go! Just mix in peanuts (or your favorite nuts) with a variety of dried fruit (such as cranberries, raisins, pineapple, bananas or apricots), dark chocolate bits and whole-grain oat squares. Separate the mix into small plastic bags and you're ready to go!



Challenge: Add nuts to 1 meal today!



Day 7:

Be Choosy About Your Chocolate

Studies show that chocolate increases antioxidant levels in the blood and helps lower blood pressure. But when it comes to reaping those antioxidant benefits, quality matters most. If you need a chocolate fix, treat yourself to a small square of dark chocolate—look for one that is 70 percent or more cocoa.

7 Amazing Health Benefits of Dark Chocolate



Challenge: Have some dark chocolate today!