



FEBRUARY, 2026

WEEK 2



SMART HEART NUTRITION: Health Over Perfection

Foods rich in potassium and fiber counter the negative effects of sodium and support circulation. Food patterns like DASH and Mediterranean style eating focus on these same building blocks and are linked with better blood pressure and heart outcomes.

Potassium, the Super Nutrient

Potassium eliminates excess sodium from the body and helps relax blood vessel walls. You may be wondering how much potassium is required for optimal health benefits. According to The American Heart Association, adults should aim for a range between 3,500 – 5,000 milligrams daily.

Potassium-rich foods include potatoes, legumes, spinach, tomatoes, avocados and bananas, to name just a few. Such foods often bring other artery-friendly nutrients at the same time, like magnesium and fiber.

Fiber's Secret Benefits

Everyone knows fiber is critical for gut health. However, it's a lesser-known fact that fiber is the powerhouse of the heart. Fiber is a type of carbohydrate essential for maintaining overall health. Fiber supports blood vessels in crucial ways. It helps with satiety (the sensation of being full after a meal), supports steady blood sugar levels,

and even improves cholesterol levels. A recent American Heart Association scientific statement reviewed evidence suggesting people with hypertension may benefit from higher fiber intake, with targets above typical minimums.

Increasing daily fiber intake is easier than you might think. Consider a delicious, steaming hot bowl of oatmeal topped with berries and walnuts (particularly great during Chicago's notorious rough winters), incorporating a variety of legumes in salad for lunch, and a vegetable casserole for dinner. Didn't forget about dessert, a bowl of Greek yogurt with berries drizzled with honey, sprinkled with chia seeds and almond slivers could be the norm in treating yourself.

Anti-inflammatory Foods That Support the Artery Lining

Blood vessels are lined with a thin layer called the endothelium. Endothelium aids in the widening and narrowing of blood vessels. Research links Mediterranean-

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We've highlighted some resources you may want to look into further. Simply click or tap the icon or its hyperlink to access these select materials!

NEW INSIGHT ON SALT SUBSTITUTES

Lowering sodium is important for blood pressure. The CDC suggests carefully reading labels, choosing low-sodium options when possible, and limiting highly processed foods that contain hidden sodium.

Salt substitutes are receiving more attention lately because certain brands are replacing a portion of the salt with potassium. In a large, randomized trial, using a salt substitute lowered rates of stroke and major cardiovascular events in a high-risk group.



For the sake of clarity, while it may seem smart to immediately try a salt substitute to help reduce sodium intake, be aware that some brands use potassium chloride, and too much potassium can be dangerous for certain people, including those with kidney disease or those taking medications which affect potassium levels. If that sounds like you, contact your physician before replacing potassium-based salt substitutes or supplements.

Salt substitutes are not the only alternative. Flavor profiles can be enhanced using garlic, citrus, vinegar, herbs, and spice blends. Unleash your creative side while cooking and explore salt alternatives from various world cuisines.

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style eating with improved endothelial function and lower cardiovascular risk.

A Mediterranean-inspired diet contains an array of options and is not restrictive in the least. Think of it as delicious vegetables sauteed in garlic and olive oil, an assortment of lentils, seafood, nuts and whole grains. Mediterranean meals contain less sugar and nothing ultra-processed. DASH eating patterns share many of the same basics and are designed for blood pressure support. The National Institutes of Health has an excellent [breakdown of DASH here](#).

Simple Swaps That Protect Your Arteries

A few realistic changes can support blood pressure without making meals feel restrictive. Try seasoning with lemon, lime, vinegar, smoked paprika, garlic, or cumin instead of adding more salt. Choose no-salt-added canned tomatoes and vegetables when possible and rinse canned beans to wash away a portion of the sodium. Select plain yogurt and add fruit instead of purchasing pre-sweetened yogurt. Build meals around fiber and potassium first, then add protein of choice.

Still uncertain about what meal to prepare? Here are a few recipes you can try this week to add to your rotation:



LEMONY SALMON AND SPINACH BOWL

INGREDIENTS:

- ▶ 2 salmon fillets (about 4–6 oz each)
- ▶ 2 cups baby spinach
- ▶ 1 cup cooked quinoa or brown rice
- ▶ 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ▶ 1 lemon
- ▶ 1 clove garlic (minced)
- ▶ black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS: Heat oven to 400°F. Place salmon on a lined pan. Drizzle with olive oil, squeeze half the lemon over it, and add garlic and pepper. Bake for 12-15 minutes until it flakes. Toss spinach with a squeeze of lemon and top with salmon over quinoa.



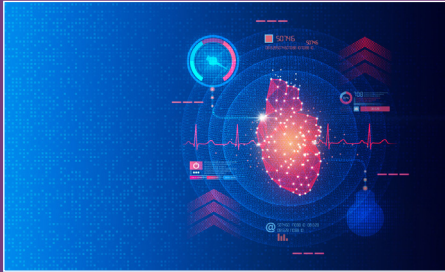
BEAN AND VEGGIE SOUP

INGREDIENTS:

- ▶ 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ▶ 1 small onion (diced)
- ▶ 2 carrots (diced)
- ▶ 2 celery stalks (diced)
- ▶ 2 cloves garlic (minced)
- ▶ 1 can no-salt-added diced tomatoes
- ▶ 1 can low-sodium or rinsed beans
- ▶ 4 cups low-sodium broth
- ▶ 2 cups chopped kale
- ▶ 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- ▶ black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS: Sauté onion, carrots, and celery in olive oil for 5 minutes. Add garlic for 30 seconds. Stir in tomatoes, beans, broth, oregano, and pepper. Simmer for 15 minutes. Add kale and cook for 5 minutes more.

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AI FOR HEART HEALTH

Try these prompts in a trusted AI tool to help you discover heart-healthy meals. This should be done without entering personal health details or account information. Customize the prompt by including your favorite produce or meat choices. AI can support your health goals, but it should not replace guidance from your physician.

- ▶ “Create a 5-day dinner plan that is high in potassium and fiber and keeps sodium moderate.”
- ▶ “Give me a grocery list for DASH-style meals that uses simple ingredients and leftovers.”
- ▶ “Suggest three lunches that include beans or lentils and take under 10 minutes to assemble.”
- ▶ “Rewrite my favorite pasta recipe to be more blood-pressure friendly.”

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BERRY OAT PARFAIT

INGREDIENTS:

- ▶ 1 cup plain Greek yogurt
- ▶ ½ cup berries (fresh or frozen)
- ▶ ¼ cup oats
- ▶ 1 tablespoon chia seeds
- ▶ 1 teaspoon honey (optional)
- ▶ cinnamon

INSTRUCTIONS: Layer yogurt, oats, berries, and chia in a cup. Add cinnamon and honey if desired. Let it sit 10 minutes or overnight so the oats soften.

Benefit Resources

- ▶ [BCBSIL](#) can help you find nutrition tools, wellness programs, and plan-support resources that fit your goals. Checking your plan’s wellness portal is also a good way to find healthy-eating programs and discounts that support your routine.

 **CLICK OR TAP!**



SOURCES: [Miguel A. Martínez-González et al, National Heart, Blood, and Lung Institute](#), [American Heart Association](#), [Hamdi A Jama et al](#), [Kaneez Fatima et al](#), [Center for Disease Control](#), [Bruce Neal et al](#), [National Institutes of Health](#)

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