

Fuel Your Heart

A Real-World Guide to Eating Heart Healthy

6 Weeks of Tips, Swaps & Real Talk About Food,
Flavor, and Feeling Good



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Intro - Let's Be Real for a Minute

If you're here, chances are you've been through a health scare. A stent, a heart attack, heart failure, or maybe a warning sign that made you stop and think: **"It's time to take better care of myself."**

That's a powerful moment. And I want to meet you there - not with lectures or guilt trips - but with practical tools, clear info, and a little encouragement.

**"This isn't about being perfect.
It's about making smarter choices more often"**

This isn't about being perfect. It's about making smarter choices more often. It's about fueling your heart with food that helps you heal and feel good.

Over the next six weeks, we'll cover the big things that affect your heart health:

- ▶ How much salt and sugar sneak into your food (spoiler: it's a lot)
- ▶ How to read a label without getting overwhelmed
- ▶ Which fats are heart-friendly (and which ones aren't doing you any favors)
- ▶ What to eat when you're out and about or grabbing something fast

And it's all packed into short, snack-sized lessons - just like we do in class. No fluff. No judgment. Just real talk.

So grab a snack (maybe one we talk about in here), and let's dive in.

You've got this.

Week 1 – Fuel Your Heart

Why the Mediterranean Lifestyle Works

Let’s kick this off with a truth bomb:
Diets don’t work long-term. But eating patterns — the way you eat most of the time — can absolutely change your health.

That’s why the **Mediterranean lifestyle** is the gold standard for heart health. It’s not just a fad or a trendy hashtag. It’s based on decades of real research and real results.

So, what is it?

Think:

- ▶ Colorful veggies
- ▶ Fresh fish
- ▶ Whole grains
- ▶ Olive oil
- ▶ The occasional glass of red wine
- ▶ And food that’s shared, not rushed.



This way of eating **reduces inflammation**, lowers cholesterol, protects blood vessels, and helps manage blood pressure, blood sugar, and even mood.

Why it beats trendy diets like low-carb, keto, or high-protein fads:

Mediterranean	Low-Carb/Keto
Encourages all food groups	Cuts out entire food groups
Easy to sustain long-term	Hard to stick with socially & emotionally
Proven heart benefits	May raise cholesterol in some people
Focuses on balance & enjoyment	Often restricts and complicates eating

It’s about learning to build a plate that feeds your heart, your body, and your life.

Pro Tip:

If you don’t love fish or olives, don’t worry. This lifestyle is flexible. It’s about building your version of Mediterranean — one that works for your tastes, culture, and budget.

Week 2 - Shake the Salt Habit

Where Salt Hides, and What You Can Do About It

Let's be honest — salt is sneaky. It's in places you wouldn't expect, and even if you never pick up a salt shaker, you might still be getting way too much.

Here's the deal:

- ▶ Too much sodium makes your heart work harder.
- ▶ It raises blood pressure.
- ▶ It pulls in extra water, making your body feel bloated and your heart strained.

So, where is all this salt coming from?

Not the salt you add at the table.

It's the salt that's already hiding in packaged foods.

Top salt offenders:

- ▶ Deli meats & cheese
- ▶ Pizza, frozen meals, and canned soups
- ▶ Breads, rolls, and biscuits
- ▶ Sauces, condiments, and dressings
- ▶ Fries and fast food

Even “**healthy**” brands can pack a salty punch.



What you can do:

1. Flip it and read it.

Check the Nutrition Facts label — shoot for less than 140 mg per serving if it says “low sodium.”

2. Watch your serving size.

That frozen burrito might say 450 mg per serving — but the label says there are 2 servings. That’s 900 mg in one sitting!

3. Rinse canned foods.

A quick rinse can reduce sodium by up to 40%.

4. Use more flavor, not more salt.

Try garlic, lemon, herbs, chili flakes, or vinegar. Your taste buds will adjust — really!

Tiny changes. Big impact.

No one’s asking you to live a salt-free life.

Just aim to lower the daily dose and make your heart’s job a little easier.

Next time you’re in the store, check a label just for fun — it’s like detective work for your health.



Week 3 – Sweet Talk

Let's Have a Word About Sugar

We all love a little sweetness. But when it comes to heart health, added sugar is one of those sneaky culprits that can cause real damage if it shows up too often.

We're not talking about fruit — nature knows what she's doing.

We're talking about the stuff added to foods and drinks to boost flavor (and shelf life): cane sugar, high fructose corn syrup, syrups, and all those “-oses.”

What added sugar does:

- ▶ Increases triglycerides (which clogs your arteries)
- ▶ Adds extra calories without filling you up
- ▶ Raises blood sugar (bad news for diabetes or pre-diabetes)
- ▶ Can lead to more belly fat and inflammation

Where it hides:

- ▶ Flavored yogurts & cereals
- ▶ Breads, granola bars, and energy bars
- ▶ Spaghetti sauces and ketchup
- ▶ Sports drinks, coffee creamers, and juice blends
- ▶ Sodas, sweet teas, energy drinks



Label decoder tip:

Check the “**Added Sugars**” line on the Nutrition Facts label.

Aim for:

- ▶ < 25g/day for women
- ▶ < 36g/day for men
(That’s about 6–9 teaspoons per day.)



Smart swaps:

Instead of:	Try this:
Sugary cereal	Oatmeal with fruit & cinnamon
Flavored yogurt	Plain Greek yogurt + berries
Soda	Sparkling water with citrus
Pastry	Apple slices + nut butter
Candy	A square of dark chocolate (or two)

Real talk:

You don’t have to cut it all out — just cut back.
Start by switching one sweet thing this week. That’s it.
Your heart will thank you (and so will your energy levels).
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Week 4 – Fat Facts

Not All Fats Are Created Equal

Fat isn't the enemy.

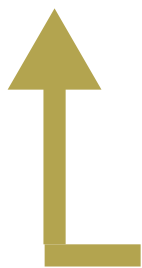
In fact, your heart needs fat — the right kind, in the right amounts.

The problem? A lot of our go-to snacks, spreads, and meals are loaded with the wrong fats — the kind that raise bad cholesterol, clog arteries, and keep your heart working overtime.

Let's break it down:

Heart-Healthy Fats (Eat More Often):

- ▶ Avocados
- ▶ Salmon, sardines, tuna
- ▶ Olive oil, olives
- ▶ Nuts and seeds
- ▶ Canola, sunflower oil



These fats help reduce inflammation and lower LDL (bad) cholesterol.

Not-So-Healthy Fats (Limit or Ditch):

- ▶ Butter, lard
- ▶ Full-fat dairy
- ▶ Fatty red meats, processed meats
- ▶ Fried foods, pastries
- ▶ Movie-theater popcorn (that butter though...)

Pro tips for swapping fats:

Instead of:	Try this:
Butter on toast	Mashed avocado or nut butter
Fried chicken	Grilled or baked chicken
Creamy dressing	Olive oil + vinegar
Full-fat cheese	Part-skim or smaller portions
Ground beef	Ground turkey or lentils

You don't have to be low-fat.

Just be fat-smart.

Start checking your labels.

Look for words like “**partially hydrogenated**” — that means trans fats, even if the label says 0g.

And don't forget — heart-healthy fats are still calorically dense. So enjoy them, just not the whole bag of almonds in one go.



Week 5 – Shop Smart

Outsmart the Grocery Store (and Your Cravings)

Let's face it: the grocery store can be a trap.

Bright colors, sneaky packaging, and “healthy-looking” foods that are secretly loaded with salt, sugar, or not-so-great fats.

But with a few tricks up your sleeve, you can shop like a heart-healthy ninja.

Your game plan:

- Stick to the outer aisles

That's where you'll find fresh produce, lean proteins, dairy, and less processed stuff. The middle aisles? That's where sugar and sodium love to hide.

- Make a list — and stick to it

Impulse buys are real (especially when you're hungry). Come prepared and don't shop hangry.

- Flip the package

Front-of-box claims like “low fat” or “all natural” are often misleading. Turn it over and check:

- ▶ Sodium: Aim for < 140 mg/serving for low-sodium foods
- ▶ Added Sugar: < 5g per serving is a solid goal
- ▶ Ingredients list: Shorter is usually better
- ▶ Watch for: hydrogenated oils, corn syrup, hidden salts like “monosodium glutamate” or “disodium phosphate”

Hidden heart hazards:

- ▶ “Healthy” frozen meals
- ▶ Canned soups & veggie burgers
- ▶ Whole wheat breads with 200mg+ sodium per slice
- ▶ Trail mixes packed with candy and salt



Stock up on:

- ▶ Fresh/frozen veggies
- ▶ Berries, apples, oranges
- ▶ Canned salmon or tuna (in water)
- ▶ Brown rice, oats, quinoa
- ▶ Low-sodium beans
- ▶ Unsalted nuts, seeds
- ▶ Garlic, herbs, vinegar, lemon



Bottom line:

You don't have to eat perfectly — just shop intentionally.

You're in charge of what goes in the cart... and what fuels your heart.

Week 6 – Eat Out & Plan Ahead

Yes, You Can Eat Out and Still Eat Smart

Let's be honest — you're going to eat out. And that's okay. Life is meant to be lived (and tasted). But when you're living with heart concerns, a few smart tweaks can keep you feeling good after the meal too.

Menu Survival Tips:

- ▶ Scan the menu like a detective
Look for grilled, baked, steamed, or roasted.
Words to watch for
(AKA code for salty or greasy):
Crispy, smothered, creamy, au gratin,
loaded, battered, fried.
- ▶ Split the plate
Portions are huge. Share a dish or
box half before you even start.
- ▶ Dressing on the side
It can save you hundreds of calories
and a mountain of sodium.
- ▶ Choose smart sides
Sub the fries for veggies, a salad, or
even fruit. Ask — you'd be
surprised how many places are flexible.
- ▶ Drink water
Skip the sugary drinks. Sparkling water with lemon? Classy and heart-smart.



Fast Food Tricks:

- ▶ Order a kid's meal (built-in portion control!)
- ▶ Choose grilled over fried
- ▶ Say no to cheese and mayo — or ask for light
- ▶ Don't supersize it (unless it's a side salad)
- ▶ Keep packets of nuts or trail mix in your bag — they're great for on-the-go hunger

Plan-Ahead Power Moves:

- ▶ Pack a snack

A handful of almonds, a banana, or even a DIY trail mix can save you from vending machine regrets.

- ▶ Know your go-to meals

Write down 2–3 easy meals or snacks that you can always fall back on. Keep those ingredients stocked.

- ▶ Leftovers = Lifesavers

Double up when cooking so you've got lunch or dinner ready the next day.



Big takeaway:

Eating out doesn't have to be off-limits — just order with your heart in mind.

Bonus Tips – Real Food Wins

You’ve made it through the core of the program — and hopefully picked up some solid habits along the way. This page is your quick-glance cheat sheet (or... smart guide) for everyday wins.

Simple Snack Ideas

Keep these on hand so you’re not tempted by vending machine mysteries:

- ▶ Apple + peanut butter
- ▶ Hummus + baby carrots
- ▶ Greek yogurt + berries
- ▶ Handful of almonds or walnuts
- ▶ Hard-boiled egg + whole grain toast
- ▶ Mini whole wheat wrap with turkey & spinach



Label-Friendly Meals

Build your meals around these heart-friendly combos:

Protein	Carb	Fat	Fiber
Grilled chicken	Quinoa	Olive oil drizzle	Steamed veggies
Salmon	Sweet potato	Avocado	Mixed greens
Tofu	Brown rice	Sesame oil	Broccoli
Eggs	Oats	Flaxseed	Berries

You don’t need to track every gram — just aim for a balance.

Hydration Reminders

Water helps regulate blood pressure, digestion, energy, and mood.

Tips to make it stick:

- ▶ Keep a refillable bottle with you
- ▶ Add lemon, cucumber, or mint for flavor
- ▶ Aim for 6–8 cups/day, more if it’s hot or you’re active (follow your doctors recommendations)
- ▶ Sip through the day — don’t guzzle all at once

Build Your Go-To Combos

Life gets busy. Save your brainpower by having go-to combos you can rotate without much thinking.

Here are a few:

- ▶ Overnight oats + fruit + seeds
- ▶ Veggie stir-fry + brown rice + protein
- ▶ Big salad + beans + whole grain pita
- ▶ Scrambled eggs + sautéed spinach + avocado toast



Your food doesn't have to be fancy — just **functional, flavorful, and full of love** for your heart.

Final Word – Keep Fueling Forward

If you've made it this far — first of all, thank you.

You've shown up for your health, your heart, and your future. That's a big deal.

You don't need to eat perfectly. You don't have to follow trends or count every calorie.

You just need to stay consistent, stay curious, and stay kind to yourself.

Change doesn't happen overnight — but it does happen when you fuel your body with the right stuff and give yourself grace along the way.

Keep these in your back pocket:

- ▶ Progress over perfection. Small steps add up.
- ▶ Your plate is your power. Every bite is a chance to feel better.
- ▶ You're not alone. Ask for help, talk with others, and keep learning.

I hope this guide gave you real tools, real hope, and maybe even a few laughs.

If you ever want to circle back to a class, chat about food, or swap snack ideas — I'm here for it.

Until then...

Eat well. Stay strong.

Fuel your heart. Fuel your life.

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Addendum - Plate Method - A Simple Way to Eat for Heart Health



The **Plate Method** is an easy visual tool that helps you build balanced meals without needing to count calories, carbs, or fat grams. Just look at your plate and aim for this:

- ▶ **Half your plate:** Non-starchy vegetables like salad greens, broccoli, carrots, cucumbers, tomatoes, or peppers. These foods are high in fiber, low in calories, and great for your heart.
- ▶ **One-quarter of your plate:** Lean protein — like grilled chicken, fish, tofu, eggs, or beans. Protein helps with strength, recovery, and keeping you full.
- ▶ **One-quarter of your plate:** Whole grains or starchy foods — such as brown rice, quinoa, corn, or sweet potatoes. These give you energy and important nutrients like fiber, B vitamins, and magnesium.
- ▶ **On the side:** Water or another heart-smart drink. Skip the sugary beverages and hydrate like a pro.

It's simple. It's **balanced**. It works — whether you're at home, eating out, or packing lunch.

