





EVIDENCE-BASED NUTRITION FOR *heart-healthy* FOODSERVICE MENUS

BY JENNY KINTER

HEART DISEASE REMAINS THE LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH

in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, with an average of one in four people dying from heart disease annually. However, the World Health Organization estimates that 75 percent of these deaths could be prevented with lifestyle management and updates—including a focus on heart-healthy nutrition.

Promoting heart health begins with nutritious foodservice menus, but that doesn't mean your operation has to sacrifice taste or wade through complicated recipes. Evidence-based nutrition strategies go back to the basics to offer options that taste great while encouraging heart health for residents and patients.

KEEP IT SIMPLE, SWEETHEART

It sounds so simple because it is: The American Heart Association recommends whole grains, fruits, vegetables, lean protein, legumes, and low-fat dairy products while limiting

foods high in saturated fats, trans fats, sodium, and added sugars.

"A heart-healthy diet really gets back to the basics of nutrition, and even simple changes to diets and menus can make a difference in heart health. This could simply be adding more vegetables to dishes or choosing a whole grain bread," said Lesley Shiery, MS, RD, a nutrition manager and registered dietitian in the General Mills Bell Institute of Health and Nutrition. The Bell Institute with General Mills Foodservice recently hosted an industry webinar on employing evidence-based nutrition for heart-healthy foodservice menus.

"When you add in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, you are also adding in fiber since each of these food groups deliver this important nutrient. Higher fiber intakes have been shown to help with maintaining healthy cholesterol levels and a healthy heart," Shiery states.

The recommended fiber intake is 38 grams per day for men and 25 grams per day for women ages 50 and under,

according to the National Academy of Medicine. For those older than 50, the recommendations drop to 30 grams a day for men and 21 grams per day for women.

Both soluble fiber—which dissolves in water and can lower blood glucose and cholesterol levels—and insoluble fiber—the type that promotes movement through the digestive system to prevent constipation—are beneficial for overall health. Unfortunately, Americans are only getting about half of their daily needs when it comes to heart-healthy fiber.

If foodservice menus are short on fiber, then beans, vegetables, and high-fiber whole-grain cereal are all easy-to-add options for bolstering fiber. Other key categories to pay attention to for evidence-based nutrition for heart health include:

Fats (oils)

While foodservice diets should limit saturated fats, it's important to remember that good fats are critical for a healthy diet.

For more nutritious recipe ideas,
visit [GeneralMillsFoodservice.com](https://www.GeneralMillsFoodservice.com)

QUINOA AND SWEET POTATO BOWL

24 servings

INGREDIENTS

Hummus

- 6 cups Garbanzo beans, no salt added, canned, well drained
- 2 cups Plain yogurt
- 1/3 cup Lemon juice, no sugar added
- 3 Tbsp. Cumin, ground, toasted
- 1 Tbsp. Garlic, fresh, minced
- 2 tsp Salt-free seasoning
- 1/2 tsp Cayenne pepper, ground

Assembly

- 6 cups Quinoa, cooked, chilled
- 6 cups Sweet potatoes, fresh, peeled, roasted, chilled
- 6 cups Garbanzo beans, no salt added, canned, well drained
- 6 cups Kale, fresh, chopped, tightly packed
- 3 cups Red cabbage, fresh, shredded
- 3 cups Avocados, fresh, sliced
- 6 each Lemons, fresh

INSTRUCTIONS

Hummus

- Add garbanzo beans (chickpeas), yogurt, lemon juice, cumin, garlic, no-salt seasoning, and cayenne pepper to bowl or food processor.
- Mix for 3-5 minutes or until almost smooth, cover and refrigerate.

Assembly

- Add 1/4 cup cooked and cooled quinoa to bottom of individual serving bowls.
- Layer 1/4 cup roasted and cooled sweet potatoes, 1/4 cup garbanzo beans (chickpeas), 1/4 cup kale, 2 Tbsp. red cabbage, and approximately 2 avocado slices (1.3 oz).
- Top with 2 oz yogurt hummus.
- Cut lemons into quarters; add 1 piece as garnish.
- Keep refrigerated until serving.

Polyunsaturated fats support the cardiovascular system. These fatty acids are essential nutrients that our bodies cannot make, which means they must come from food. Polyunsaturated fats can be found in fatty fish such as tuna, salmon, and sardines as well as soybean, corn, sunflower, walnut, and grapeseed oils.

Likewise, *monounsaturated fats* can reduce LDL (bad) cholesterol and raise HDL (good) cholesterol. Diets that consist of more than 12 percent of monounsaturated fats—the kind of fat found in oils, seeds, and nuts – are associated with lower fat mass and decreased blood pressure.

Sodium

With high blood pressure—a risk factor for heart disease—on the rise, nutritionists are recommending that most Americans keep their sodium intake to 1,500 milligrams per day at the most. This is the amount of sodium in just half a teaspoon of salt.

One foodservice trick is to opt for a kosher salt with a larger grain as well as spices and herbs that can add depth and flavor, allowing foodservice professionals to reduce or eliminate sodium altogether. Vinegar and a spritz of lemon can also serve as flavorful substitutions for salt. Finally, foodservice operations and individuals alike should be on the lookout for sodium in pre-packaged foods; fortunately, there are many low- or no-sodium options available today.

SERVING UP GOOD HEART HEALTH IN BUSY FOODSERVICE OPERATIONS

Again, supporting patients' and residents' heart health comes back to the basics and doing the simple things well. Busy foodservice operations can

Visit [GeneralMillsFoodservice.com](https://www.GeneralMillsFoodservice.com) to view their webinar, “Hearts Matter: Using evidence-based nutrition to develop heart-healthy foodservice menus” for ideas, inspiration, and the latest nutritional science.

provide healthy, colorful, and varied options that look and taste great. Serving up the rainbow is an excellent place to start.

“We know from research that getting more fruits and vegetables in the diet is strongly associated with a reduced risk of heart disease; however, a majority of Americans aren’t getting the recommended amount in their daily diet. Foodservice professionals are in a unique position to be able to boost menu items with a variety of fruits and vegetables whether fresh, canned, or frozen,” said Shiery. She also notes the variety piece is important. Each fruit and vegetable has unique nutrients it brings to the table, and some research has shown certain types of fruits and veggies have stronger effects on health—such as dark leafy greens and dark berries.

To increase heart-healthy fruit consumption, operations can mix up their grab-and-go options with blood oranges, cara cara oranges, and clementines to pique interest instead of just apples, bananas, and oranges. Fruit compote with yogurt can also be a simple-to-make and easy-to-enjoy choice for heart health.

Operations can also dish up interest and heart health with a focus on:

Non-starchy vegetables

Broccoli, tomatoes, cauliflower, and mushrooms are high in nutrients and fiber and low in starches. Starchy vegetables such as potatoes, corn, peas, and squash also contain heart-healthy nutrients and fibers and shouldn’t be demonized.

One cup of raw veggies or ½ cup cooked veggies represent a single serving; most adults are encouraged to get 3 to 5 servings per day. It is easy to

add frozen or fresh vegetables to side dishes, a baked mac and cheese dish, pasta sauce and soups, providing longtime favorite items with an extra kick of veggies.

And while plain vegetables can be a little boring, adding a fun dipping sauce can spike interest and appetites.



LEGUMES SUCH AS BEANS AND LENTILS are a terrific source of plant-based protein.

Whole grain

It is not necessary to eat 100 percent whole grain. Instead, a point of reference is to aim for half the amount of grains we are eating as whole grains as a goal.

For foodservice operations interested in expanding whole-grain choices, a morning oatmeal bar with both savory and sweet add-ons such as veggies/egg/cheese or fruit compote/nut butters is a good way to start the day with whole grains. Another favorite is breakfast sandwiches with whole-grain biscuits, eggs, and vegetables.

Lean protein

When seeking lean protein options, look for the words “loin” and “round.” Seafood, poultry, eggs, and pork can all deliver on flavor while packing

a protein punch. Instead of protein-heavy servings, think about a plate that is one-quarter protein, or serve up a 4-ounce steak instead of an 8-ounce portion. Another simple twist is to add grated veggies to a turkey burger or chili to provide moisture, flavor, and heart-healthy vitamins and nutrients.

Legumes such as beans and lentils are a terrific source of plant-based protein. One-half cup of cooked legumes served four times per week was associated with a 22 percent lower risk of coronary heart disease and an 11 percent reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, according to a recent U.S.-based NHane study. They also support improved blood glucose levels and weight management. Pureed white beans lend themselves perfectly to spinach dip, while whole and pureed beans and lentils are ideal for soups.

Dairy

This foundational food group contributes needed calcium, vitamin D, and potassium that many Americans fall short on. Low-fat and fat-free dairy are part of the American Heart Association’s dietary recommendations, particularly fermented dairy such as yogurt and hard cheese that may have an inverse relationship with cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. Beyond popular yogurt parfaits, a yogurt-based protein salad can feature egg, chicken, veggies, or fruit, substituting yogurt for traditional mayo.

DIETARY TRENDS BUILT TO LAST

From the Atkins diet to the South Beach diet, many dietary trends come and go, but there are a few that have stood the test of time and for good reason.

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THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET is known for use of olive oil and nuts, plants and whole grains, which can prevent and treat cardiovascular disease.

U.S. News & World Report has rated the Mediterranean diet as the most heart-healthy option for seven years in a row. It also ranks high in the categories of healthy eating, easy to follow, best plant-based diet, and best diet for diabetics.

Based on a pattern of eating, cooking, and the lifestyle found in countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, the Mediterranean diet is known for use of olive oil and nuts, plants and whole grains, which can prevent and treat cardiovascular disease. It is also well-suited to foodservice operations.

Not only is its plant-forward approach heart-healthy and low in refined sugar, but many of its components are simple to prepare and feature. For instance, homemade dressings such as pesto with any type of nut or seed can make for a delicious dip. It is also easy to add nuts and seeds to sides, entrees, and desserts alike—from toasted pecans to dried cranberries. This diet also encourages regular daily activity, such as walking, and making meals more social and connected, which can support an overall healthy lifestyle.

The DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet earns the second spot, supporting reduction in

heart disease and dementia, among other conditions. Rich in potassium, magnesium, and calcium with moderate sodium intake, this diet is also plant-forward with a focus on produce, nuts, legumes, whole grains, and some animal protein—typically seafood, eggs, low-fat dairy, and smaller portions of meat. It also limits refined sugars.

In addition to adding fresh herbs to main and side dishes and salads, here are some tips for integrating both the Mediterranean and DASH diets into your operation:

Bulk up animal protein dishes with plants

You can add extra beans to chili and cut the amount of meat in half, or include grated vegetables in meatballs or meatloaf, for example.

Experiment with different types of grains

Farro, quinoa, millet, teff, and barley all have unique flavors and textures; explore one new grain per week to highlight its flavor profile and introduce a new heart-healthy option for patients and residents. You can also add fruits, veggies, and nuts to a rice side dish, for instance, to brighten up traditional fare.

Dips, dressings, and marinades, oh my!

People are more apt to try a new or unusual item when it has a tasty dip or dressing. Hummus or a citrusy marinade can add flavor and interest.

Incorporate soy foods

Silken tofu is your friend when it comes to pureed soups and desserts such as a vegan chocolate “pudding.” It sets beautifully in the refrigerator and adds plant-based protein to any meal. Edamame is another hit in salads, side dishes, and stir fries—try adding it to a snack mix made with whole-wheat Chex and dried edamame for an instant classic.

Offer desserts and sweets that are fruit-based

Think more strawberries and less shortcake for a healthier version of this classic dessert, for example. Fruit offers natural sweetness that lends itself well to most desserts while raising the nutritional profile.

Ultimately, providing heart-healthy options comes as much from the heart as it does from the head. Showcase fun flavors, brighten up your grab-and-go with a rainbow of choices, and offer healthy servings that support wellness from the inside out. **E**



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