

HealthPoint

TRENDS IN HEALTH & WELLNESS

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Eating Well to Prevent Stroke

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It's a fact: 90% of strokes are caused by unhealthy lifestyle choices. While your family history of heart disease, your age and ethnic background can't be controlled, an unhealthy diet is a major risk factor you can do something about.

By regularly eating a healthy diet, one that includes vegetables and fruit and is low in salt and unhealthy fats, you can help protect yourself from developing high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, and obesity, which are all risk factors for stroke. Here are 5 quick tips you can follow now to ensure you're eating healthy.

Pop one more vegetable and fruit into your day Start by switching from having a donut to a handful of baby carrot sticks in the afternoon or an apple after dinner. You'll up your level of heart-healthy nutrients and most likely cut down on unhealthier food choices throughout your day.

Be savvy about salt About 80% of the salt we consume comes from fast foods, processed meats such as hot dogs and lunchmeats, canned soups, bottled dressings, ketchup and salty snacks like potato chips. Eating foods with too much salt may increase the amount of blood in the arteries, raising blood pressure, which is the number one risk factor for stroke. Because our diets are generally so high in salt, everybody – even those with normal blood pressure – can benefit from reducing salt intake. Read labels in the grocery store and choose foods with lower salt. Flavour your foods with a variety of herbs and spices rather than salt.

Get the bad fat out Eating too much and the wrong kinds of fats, such as saturated and trans fats, may raise unhealthy LDL cholesterol and lower healthy HDL cholesterol. Unhealthy cholesterol can accumulate on artery walls, which makes your heart pump harder in order to circulate blood. This can lead to high blood pressure, narrowing of the arteries (atherosclerosis), heart attack and stroke.

Make sure the fats and oils you use in cooking, salad dressings, soft non-hydrogenated margarine and mayonnaise are made from healthy olive, soybean, canola or peanut oils. Try consuming fish, chicken and turkey, beans and legumes more often. Choose lower-fat dairy products and look for packaged and processed foods that are trans fat free.

Reach for fresh food Processed and packaged foods are often high in fat and sodium. By making your own homemade meals with fresh ingredients as often as possible, you can control for salt and fat.

Go smaller While it is important to enjoy the foods you eat, it is more important to keep the amount you eat in check. Load up half your plate with vegetables – dark green (lettuces, broccoli, kale) and orange (carrots, squash) are the most nutritious; One quarter of your plate should contain beans, or lean meats no bigger than the palm of your hand, the last quarter with whole grains such as brown rice or quinoa (125 mL/1/2 cup is sufficient).

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