

# February Nutrition and Heart Health

February is **Heart Health Month**, and it's a time of year when a lot of people start thinking more about their health.

## Everyday Nutrition Habits That Supports Your Heart

### Meal building basics

For heart-healthy nutrition that actually feels doable, start with the basics. Most people don't need a perfect diet. They need a simple structure that can be repeated.

- Build meals around whole foods: protein + produce + quality fats
- Aim for protein + fiber at every meal
- Eat enough protein daily. Aim for 20-30g per meal
- Examples: fruit + nuts, rice + chicken + veggies, toast + eggs

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### Blood sugar + cravings control

Blood sugar balance is one of the biggest game-changers for heart health and weight management. When blood sugar stays more stable, it helps inflammation, insulin resistance, triglycerides, and cravings.

**A simple meal formula to stabilize blood sugar = protein + fiber + healthy fat**

- Avoid "naked carbs" (carbs by themselves)
- Carbs aren't the enemy, but carbs by themselves tend to spike blood sugar
- Reduce constant snacking
- Cut back on liquid sugar (juice, sweet coffee drinks)
- Choose carbs with fiber (potatoes, fruit, squash) instead of crackers/cereal

### Quick breakfast ideas

- Eggs + avocado + berries
- Greek yogurt + chia + berries + cinnamon
- Protein smoothie + nut butter + spinach

- Cottage cheese + fruit + nuts

### Quick lunch ideas

- Chicken + rice + veggies
- Turkey sandwich + side salad

- Tuna salad + crackers + sliced veggies
- Leftovers: protein + veggie + carb

#### Quick snack ideas

- Apple + peanut butter
- Turkey roll-ups + cucumber
- Beef stick + fruit
- Yogurt + berries
- Nuts + a piece of fruit

- Greek bowl: chicken + cucumber + tomato + olive oil

#### Quick dinner ideas

- Salmon + roasted potatoes + broccoli
- Ground turkey tacos + slaw + avocado
- Steak + sweet potato + asparagus
- Chicken stir-fry + rice + mixed veggies
- Burger bowl: burger patty + greens + tomato + pickles + fries or potatoes

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## Fat quality + omega-3s

Not all fats are the same. Quality fats support hormones, fullness, and steady energy, and **omega-3 fats** are especially supportive for heart health. Focus on quality omega-3 fats and colorful plants.

#### Healthy fats include:

- Olive oil and avocado oil
- Avocado
- Nuts and seeds
- Whole eggs
- Fatty fish (salmon, sardines)

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## Food quality upgrades (what to limit + what to choose)

Food quality matters, but **you don't have to be perfect**. The goal is to eat in a way that lowers inflammation most of the time and supports your body long-term. A realistic goal is an **80/20 approach**, and you can adjust that based on how you feel. The main goal is to reduce ultra-processed foods and packaged foods since they can increase inflammation.

### Lower inflammation foods tend to be:

- Whole foods: chicken, eggs, salmon, sweet potatoes, berries, rice, oats
- Nutrient-dense foods: leafy greens, berries, citrus, mushrooms, pumpkin seeds, sardines
- Quality proteins: eggs, chicken, turkey, salmon, sardines, Greek yogurt, lean beef
- Colorful plants: blueberries, strawberries, oranges, bell peppers, tomatoes, carrots, spinach
- Omega-3 fats (salmon, sardines): salmon, sardines, trout, mackerel, anchovies

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### Mineral balance: don't automatically fear salt

Mineral balance matters for heart health, hydration, energy, and blood pressure. Salt isn't automatically bad. The goal is to balance sodium with potassium, magnesium, and enough water.

- If your blood pressure is normal (around **120/80**): Focus on balanced electrolytes and hydration, not fear of salt.
- If your blood pressure is high (generally **130/80 or higher**): Watch hidden sodium in packaged foods, drink enough water, and be mindful with added salt.
- If your blood pressure is low (often **under 90/60**) and you feel lightheaded when standing: You may need more electrolytes, especially around workouts.

### Nutrition habits that support better sleep

- Stop eating at least 2 hours before bed so your blood sugar isn't spiking while you sleep
  - Eat a protein-centered dinner to balance blood sugar overnight
  - If you want dessert, have it right after dinner or earlier in the day to avoid mid-sleep spikes
  - Give yourself a cutoff for drinking water so sleep isn't interrupted
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# Easy Heart-Healthy Dinner Party (for 8 adults)

## The system

- You pick the menu
- Send the recipes ahead of time so nobody has to think
- Guests choose something to bring
- You make the main dish
- Try these:

## Oven Citrus Garlic Chicken (Serves 8)

### Ingredients

- 3 to 3.5 lbs chicken thighs (boneless or bone-in)
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- Zest of 2 lemons
- Juice of 2 lemons (about 1/3 cup)
- Juice of 1 orange (about 1/4 cup)
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp black pepper
- 2 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp oregano (or Italian seasoning)
- Optional: 1/2 tsp red pepper flakes
- Optional: 1 sliced red onion + 2 sliced bell peppers (roast in the pan)



### Instructions

1. Preheat oven to **425°F**.
2. In a bowl, mix olive oil, garlic, lemon zest, lemon juice, orange juice, salt, pepper, paprika, and oregano.
3. Add chicken and coat well. Let it sit **15–30 minutes** if you have time (or cook right away).
4. Place chicken on a sheet pan or baking dish. Add onion/peppers if using.
5. Bake **25–35 minutes** until cooked through (165°F).
6. Optional: broil **2–3 minutes** at the end for extra crisp edges.
7. Spoon pan juices over the chicken before serving.

## Slow Cooker Carnitas (Serves 8)

### Ingredients

- 3.5 to 4 lbs pork shoulder (pork butt)
- 1 tbsp salt
- 2 tsp black pepper
- 2 tsp cumin
- 2 tsp oregano
- 2 tsp smoked paprika (optional but good)
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- Juice of 2 oranges (about 1 cup)
- Juice of 2 limes (about 1/4 cup)
- 1/2 cup chicken broth (or water)
- 1 small onion, sliced
- Optional: 1 jalapeño, sliced (for heat)



### Instructions

1. Add pork shoulder to the slow cooker.
2. Sprinkle with salt, pepper, cumin, oregano, and smoked paprika. Add garlic, onion, citrus juices, and broth.
3. Cook on **LOW 8–10 hours** or **HIGH 5–6 hours** until it shreds easily.
4. Shred the pork with two forks and mix it into the juices.
5. Optional (best part): spread shredded pork on a sheet pan and broil **5–8 minutes** until the edges crisp.

### Serving ideas

- Carnitas tacos with mango cabbage slaw
- Carnitas bowls with rice + fajita veggies + avocado

## Mango Cabbage Slaw (Serves 8)

### Ingredients

- 6 cups shredded cabbage (green or a mix)
- 1 large carrot, shredded
- 1 large mango, diced (or 1.5 cups diced mango)
- 1/2 red onion, thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup chopped cilantro (optional)

### Dressing

- Juice of 2 limes
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp honey (or maple syrup)
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp black pepper
- Optional: 1/2 tsp chili powder or Tajín



### Instructions

1. Add cabbage, carrot, mango, red onion, and cilantro to a large bowl.
2. Whisk together lime juice, olive oil, honey, salt, pepper, and chili powder/Tajín.
3. Pour dressing over the slaw and toss well.
4. Let sit **10–15 minutes** before serving for best flavor.

## Roasted Fajita Veggies (Serves 8)

### Ingredients

- 3 bell peppers, sliced
- 2 large onions, sliced
- 2 zucchini, sliced (optional)
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp black pepper
- 2 tsp chili powder
- 2 tsp cumin



- 1 tsp garlic powder
- Juice of 1 lime (optional)

### Instructions

1. Preheat oven to **425°F**.
  2. Add sliced veggies to a sheet pan.
  3. Toss with olive oil, salt, pepper, chili powder, cumin, and garlic powder.
  4. Roast **20–25 minutes**, stirring halfway through.
  5. Optional: squeeze lime juice over the top before serving.
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## Roasted Sweet Potatoes with Lime + Salt (Serves 8)

### Ingredients

- 4 large sweet potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp black pepper
- Juice of 2 limes
- Optional: 1/2 tsp chili powder or Tajín



### Instructions

1. Preheat oven to **425°F**.
  2. Toss sweet potatoes with olive oil, salt, pepper, and chili powder/Tajín if using.
  3. Spread on a sheet pan in an even layer.
  4. Roast **25–35 minutes**, flipping halfway through, until browned and tender.
  5. Squeeze lime juice over the top before serving.
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## Flourless Chocolate Lava Cakes (Serves 8)

### Ingredients

- 8 oz dark chocolate (60–70%), chopped
- 1/2 cup butter (or coconut oil)
- 4 large eggs
- 1/2 cup sugar (or maple sugar)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1/4 tsp salt
- Optional: 1 tbsp cocoa powder

### Instructions

1. Preheat oven to **425°F**. Grease 8 ramekins or a muffin tin.
2. Melt chocolate and butter together until smooth.
3. Whisk eggs, sugar, vanilla, and salt in a bowl.
4. Stir in melted chocolate mixture. Add cocoa powder if using.
5. Pour into ramekins/muffin cups.
6. Bake **9–12 minutes** until edges are set but centers are still soft.
7. Let rest **1–2 minutes** and serve warm.



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## Chocolate Avocado Mousse (Serves 8)

### Ingredients

- 3 ripe avocados
- 1/2 cup cocoa powder
- 1/3 cup maple syrup (or honey)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/4 to 1/2 cup milk of choice (to blend)
- Optional: blend in 1–2 tbsp peanut butter or almond butter



## Instructions

1. Add avocados, cocoa powder, maple syrup, vanilla, salt, and milk to a blender or food processor.
2. Blend until completely smooth and creamy. Add more milk if needed.
3. Taste and adjust sweetness if needed.
4. Chill **30–60 minutes** before serving for best texture.

## Toppings (optional)

- Fresh berries
- Shaved dark chocolate
- Chopped nuts
- Coconut flakes
- A pinch of flaky salt

## Sources

- Chronic tissue inflammation and metabolic disease:  
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- Postprandial Hyperglycemia and Cardiovascular Disease:  
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- Low-Grade Inflammation and Ultra-Processed Foods Consumption: A Review:  
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- Low blood pressure (hypotension) — Diagnosis and treatment (low salt, fluids can increase blood volume and help raise blood pressure):  
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/low-blood-pressure/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20355470/>
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