

# Nutrition and AFib: What Should You Eat?



Judith M. Hinderliter, MPH, RD, LDN, CPT  
UNC Cardiac Rehab Program Clinical Dietitian  
[Judith.hinderliter@unch.unc.edu](mailto:Judith.hinderliter@unch.unc.edu)

984-974-2551

# Guide for Improving CV Health and Reducing the Risk for Afib

- Consume an overall healthy diet pattern:
  - Emphasizes intake of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains;
  - includes low-fat dairy products, poultry, fish, legumes, non-tropical vegetable oils, and nuts; and
  - limits intake of sweets, sugar-sweetened beverages, and red meats

# Guide for Improving CV Health

- Aim for a healthy body weight (BMI <25)
  - Lowers LDL and non-HDL cholesterol; increases HDL
  - Lowers blood pressure
  - Lowers the incidence of Afib and persistence

Arnett et. al Circulation 2019 140:e596-e646;  
Pallazola et al. Mayo Clin Proc Innov Qual Outcomes.  
2019 3(3): 251–267.



# Cardioprotective Diet

Keep it Simple!

## 1. Vegetables

**Goal:** 4-5 servings daily

**Serving size:** 1 cup raw leafy veggies, ½ cup cooked raw or 100% juice

**Example:** 1 cup of spinach, ½ cup carrots, broccoli, asparagus, collard greens, or salsa  
*Does not include:* starchy veggies (potatoes, peas, & corn)



## 2. Fruits

**Goal:** 4-5 servings daily

**Serving size:** 1 medium fruit (apple, peach), ½ cup fresh, frozen or unsweetened canned fruit (“In its own juices”)

**Example:** ½ cup berries, melon, & avocado



## 3. Whole Grains



**Goal:** 3 + servings daily

**Fiber needs:**

Men: 35-40 grams daily  
Women: 25-30 grams daily

**Serving size:** 1 slice bread, 1 cup dry cereal, ½ cup rice,

pasta, hot cereal

**Example:** Choose “Whole Wheat” bread or pasta & ½ cup of oatmeal or brown rice

## 4. Low-Fat Dairy

**Goal:** 2-3 servings daily

**Serving size:** 1 cup (8 oz) milk or ¾ cup (6 oz) yogurt, 1 oz cheese (4 dice together)

**Example:** Skim or 1% Milk & low fat yogurt!



## 5. Fish & Shellfish

**Goal:** 2+ servings weekly

**Serving size:** 3.5 oz (deck of cards)

**“Fatty Fish”:** Salmon, Tuna, Trout, Herring, Sardines, Mackerel

**Other Lean Protein Sources:** Grilled, baked, roasted, or broiled chicken & fish, turkey breast, eggs, beans & lentils



## 6. Nuts & Seeds

**Goal:** 4-5 servings weekly

**Serving size:** 1 oz (a small handful)

**Example:** 23 almonds or 30 pistachios  
Contains healthy fats, minerals, and protein!



## 7. Vegetable Oils (Unsaturated fats)

**Goal:** 2-6 servings daily

**Serving size:** 1 teaspoon oil; 1 tablespoon vegetable oil spread

**Best choices:** Olive, Canola, Safflower, Peanut, or Soybean oils.

**Aim for “Liquid” fat vs. “Solid” fat**



**Avoid:** *trans*-fats, listed as “partially hydrogenated oils”

**Limit:** lunchmeat and cured meats (bacon), sugary beverages, sweets & baked goods made with “refined grains”.

# Healthier Fats

- The American Heart Association recommends eating fish at least twice a week:
  - One serving is 3-4 ounces (oz)
  - 3 oz is the size of a deck of cards
  - Studies have linked diets high in omega-3 polyunsaturated fats with lower Afib.



# Do Not Drink Alcohol Excessively

One drink is equal to:

- 12 fluid ounces (fl oz) of beer or wine cooler
- 5 fl oz of wine
- 1.5 fl oz of 80-proof liquor

Moderate drinking is defined as:

- No more than one drink per day  
for women
- No more than two drinks/day  
for men



Drinking more than three drinks/day has a detrimental effect on the heart.

# Why Reduce Sodium?

- For a healthier blood pressure and to reduce your Afib risk
- Extra sodium increases calcium losses



# Ways to Decrease Sodium

- Do not add salt
- Use more fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats
- Season food with herbs rather than salt-based seasonings
- Try using lower-sodium products
- Watch out for condiments
- Rinse canned foods that contain salt with water (use a strainer)
- Limit processed and frozen foods that use salt as a preservative and flavoring agent.



# Sleep Durations and Cardiovascular Health

Sleep duration and quality is being emphasized for cardiovascular health:

- AHA recommends 7-9 hours per night for adults as the ideal average
- Helps reduce elevated blood pressure

Improve quality by:

- Reducing blue light exposure before bedtime
- Avoiding caffeine at night
- Drinking your fluids earlier in the day

# Summary

Latest evidence for the role of diet in CVD and reduction of Afib supports:

- Cardioprotective Eating Plan
  - Mediterranean Diet
  - Decrease consumption of processed meats
- Not skipping meals
- Lose 5-10% of body weight if overweight with a goal of BMI of 25.
- Limit alcohol intake to 1-2 drinks per day or less
- Avoid salt shaker and limit processed foods or foods in cellophane packages.
- The American Heart Association encourages a sodium intake of 1500 mg/day
- Limit added sugars to no more than: 100 calories per day for women and 150 calories per day for men.
- Aim for two fish servings per week or incorporate non marine sources of omega-3's
- No need to limit caffeine unless it is a trigger.

# Questions?

