

A diet that will keep your heart pulsating

Rhythmically try opening and closing your hand once every second. It is possible only for a few minutes after which you get tired and give up the exercise. The heart muscle performs the same exercise, but unceasingly from birth to death without tiring, as long as it is maintained in good health.

The only time it rests is some tenth of a second between beats to receive blood and nutrients from the coronary arteries. The heart needs a permanent blood supply and any blockage causes a heart attack or cardiac arrest. Cholesterol is the most common cause of blockage of the coronary artery.

It also requires sufficient oxygen, nutrients particularly fatty acids, glucose and the B group of vitamins.

After a heart attack, a diet rich in fruits and vegetables is highly recommended. Their anti-oxidant action reduces necrosis (cellular death) in the heart muscle. The effects of heart attack can be reversed by eating a healthy diet within a year, according to a study carried out in California, USA.

Recent studies have shown that high homocysteine levels in blood increase the risk of myocardial infarction or stroke. Homocysteine is a free amino acid circulating in the blood, which does not form part of any protein. Folates (Vitamin B) reduce homocysteine levels. Deficiency of folates in blood produces an increase in homocysteine levels. Foods rich in folates are legumes and green leafy vegetables, oil-bearing nuts and seaweeds. Cherimoya (*matomoko* in Kikuyu), with its white

pulp of unique flavour, strengthens the heart. The cherimoya has abundant sugar, especially fructose and saccharose, but low in fats and protein. They are rich in fibre, potassium and low in sodium and fat, making them heart-healthy food. They have a creamy, smooth pulp with antacid effect beneficial for stomach ulcers and gastritis. They have an appetite satisfying effect and are naturally invigorating, making them appropriate weight loss treatment foods. They are eaten fresh or as shakes in milk or orange juice. For a healthy heart, also eat grapes, strawberry, mangoes, peach macadamia, and anti-oxidants (as in carotenoids and vitamin C and E). Grapes invigorate the heart and improve blood flow.

A course of grape treatment involves eating only 1-3 kgs of grapes a day for at least three consecutive days and helps in the prevention of heart attack. Grapes also have anti-cancer effects. Their anti-anaemic effect is due to high iron levels. Non-alcoholic red wine has cardio-protective phytochemicals and nutrients present in grapes.

Strawberry contains the most powerful anti-oxidants of any fruit. They can contribute to stopping the progress of arteriosclerosis and improve circulation in the coronary arteries after a heart attack. Banana, peas, walnut, broccoli, cherry, plant-based foods high in fibre and onions are indispensable for the healthy heart.

GOOD LIVING

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Tips on maintaining a healthy heart

- Minimise dietary cholesterol and saturated fat – beef, pork, eggs, butter, cheese, and ice cream.
- Replace animal-based fats with vegetable oils such as olive oils or wheat germ oils that are unsaturated.
- Eat at least five portions of fresh fruit daily – they contain anti-oxidant vitamins.
- Eat at least one fresh vegetable salad a day that is dressed with olive oil.
- Eat two to three portions of legumes per week – they are rich in B group of vitamins.
- Eat whole grain bread instead of white bread.
- Reduce salt and sugar consumption.
- Avoid tobacco and coffee, sodium and iron in form of heme contained in animal blood.
- Perform physical exercises for at least 40 minutes thrice a week.

