

Here's the No. 1 Thing to Do for Good Heart Health

The best thing you can do for heart health is to stop eating processed foods. What are processed foods?

They are foods that have had something “done” to them. Processed foods are the prepared foods that are in packages. They are fast foods and in most cases restaurant foods.

The reason processed foods are so bad for your heart is that almost all processed foods contain at least one of these damaging ingredients—oftentimes all three: sugar, trans fat and Omega-6 fat. All three of these ingredients have been proven to cause inflammation, which leads to heart disease.

Remember, sugar is not only the obvious High Fructose Corn Syrup, but also refined carbohydrates, which have the same effect on your body as actual table sugar. Refined carbohydrates are things like white flour.

It's gotten to the point that when I see a product containing a refined carbohydrate in my mind's eye I no longer see wheat, but sugar. It really helps to avoid the temptation to eat such products if you get in the habit of looking at one and immediately saying to yourself, “That's just sugar.”

Trans fats are “hydrogenated oils.” As the name suggests, they are oils that have been infused with hydrogen in a lab somewhere. Trans fats are not found anywhere in nature. This is clearly a highly commercialized product.

Trans fats were formulated so foods would retain their shelf life. Trans fats are the reason processed foods do not “go bad” as quickly as foods containing natural fats do. So if you think it's a good thing that you can buy your packaged

cookies, crackers, cereals and pastries on one day, put them in your cupboard, and pull them out two months later (usually much longer!) and eat them, think again.

It's actually a very, very bad thing. The trans fat that allows that to happen is only good for people who sell those foods. The fact is, molecularly, trans fats are very similar to plastic. Our bodies do not recognize plastic, and do not know how to process it. So it's little wonder trans fats cause internal inflammation and ultimately heart disease.

Omega-6 fats also cause inflammation. These are the vegetable oils. The most common vegetable oil in processed food is soybean oil. It's been said that every American eats soybean oil every day.

The real problem with Omega-6 fats is the same as the problem with sugar. That is, we eat too much of them. In other words, a tiny bit of sugar and a tiny bit of Omega-6 is OK.

Most Americans, however, consume massive amounts of both, which our bodies are nowhere near equipped to handle, and that overload causes deadly inflammation.

The reason too much Omega-6 fats, the vegetable oils, are bad is because our bodies are designed to operate efficiently with about equal amounts of Omega-6 fats and Omega-3 fats (Omega-3 fats are found in fish oil). The problem is that most Americans consume 20 times the amount of Omega-6 fats compared to Omega-3's, which leads to massive, massive inflammation.

Many Americans hardly ever eat Omega-3 fats. Since Omega-6s and Omega-3s actually compete against each other, even if you are eating some Omega-3s, your body might not get the benefit if you are loading-up on too many Omega-6s.

Another problem with most vegetable oils is the way in which they are processed. Most of the vegetable oils, such as the ones in the clear, plastic bottles lining the grocery store

aisle, is that they are heated and refined to the point that they are distorted and dangerous to our bodies.

So, stay away from packaged foods, because they likely contain sugar, trans fat or Omega-6 fat ... or some combination of the three.

Sadly, most restaurants use lots of sugar, trans fats and Omega-6 fats. This goes for fast food restaurants, but also the sit-down type too.

The bottom line is: For heart health, eat whole foods that you cook at home. This requires more time and energy than eating processed foods. But isn't it worth it?

By the way, watch out for hydrogenated oils and Omega-6 fats, even if you're cooking at home. Most margarines, "spreads," oils and shortenings at the grocery store fall into those categories. Therefore, cook with avocado oil at high temperature. Coconut oil and butter are good at medium temperature, olive oil is good raw or at low temperature.

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