Whole grains and fiber: Multiple studies support the role of whole grains in health-promoting diets. Whole grains contain fiber, phytochemicals, vitamins, and minerals that may contribute to the reduction of heart disease risk. Fiber may be the most important component of all; both insoluble and soluble. Soluble fiber binds with fatty acids and lowers LDL or “bad” cholesterol, while also regulating blood sugar. It is important to state that the benefits of soluble fiber have been most studied in natural food sources such as oat/oat bran, beans, whole grains, fruits and vegetables. Although “fiber” (most likely in the form of inulin) is being added to former unhealthy products to make them more marketable, it may not have a positive effect of lowering cholesterol levels. Stick to whole foods until more research can validate their potential positive effects.

Exercise: It’s inactivity that’ll get you. Regular physical activity can help control blood lipid abnormalities, diabetes, and obesity. Cardiovascular activity (aerobic activity) can also help reduce blood pressure. Although all activity is beneficial, moderate to vigorous aerobic activity is protective. That includes brisk walking, hiking, stair-climbing, aerobic exercise, running, bicycling, and rowing. Aim to get at least 30 minutes most days of the week.

Salt: You may think that since you don’t salt food at the table, your sodium intake is relatively low. About 11% of the sodium in our diets comes from added salt; however 80% of our salt intake is that which is added to foods before they are sold. Most people eat twice the recommended limits of salt each day, which can lead to increases in blood pressure; a leading risk factor for heart attacks and strokes. Try these flavor enhancers instead: garlic powder, fresh ground black pepper, onion powder, fresh lemon or lime juice, roasted garlic, or ground sunflower seeds.

Omega-3 fatty acids: Omega-3’s may help lower your risk of coronary artery disease by decreasing triglyceride levels, slowing the rate of atherosclerotic plaque, and slightly lowering blood pressure. Ideally, we should have a ratio of 1:2 omega-3 to omega-6 fatty acids to reduce inflammation. Omega-6’s come from foods such as meat, poultry, eggs, canola oil, and sunflower oil. NutriCat recommends getting omega-3 fatty acids from low-mercury fish such as sardines, scallops or salmon. Meat-free options include flax seeds, walnuts, mustard seeds, cabbage, and cloves. Add some ground flax seeds to your peanut butter or smoothie for a healthy heart boost.

Stop smoking: Lastly, don’t smoke. If you currently smoke, try your hand at quitting. Not only do cigarettes take away years on your life, they also increase the risk of a heart attack by promoting constriction in your arteries.

Bottom line: Genetics aside, you can significantly reduce your risk of developing cardiovascular disease through diet and lifestyle modifications. These tips are just some of the ways to decrease your chances. Find out more at www.americanheart.org or www.eatright.org
Be Heart Healthy

Try these simple, delicious recipes that pack in whole grains and cholesterol lowering fiber.

**Veggie Chili with Bulgur Wheat**
- 2 onions, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 medium sweet potatoes, washed and cubed
- 2 zucchini squash, diced
- 1 red pepper, diced
- 4 tbsp. Chili seasoning
- 2 cans diced tomatoes
- 1/2 cup uncooked bulgur wheat
- 1 can black beans, 1 can pinto beans, 1 can kidney beans
- 1 cup frozen corn

Sauté onions and garlic in olive oil until translucent. Add 5 cups of water, bring to a boil and add sweet potatoes. Cook for 10-15 minutes until done. Lower to a simmer, add remaining ingredients, except beans. Cook until bulgur is tender, about 10 minutes. Add beans, reduce heat to low and continue to cook for thirty minutes until chili comes together. If it’s too thick, add vegetable stock to thin.  

**Caprese Pasta**
- 1 lb of your favorite whole wheat pasta (NutriCat likes fusilli or penne)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 cups cherry tomatoes, halved or quartered
- 1/2 cup fresh basil leaves, torn
- 8 oz. fresh mozzarella, diced

Cook pasta in salted water until al dente. Drain pasta into a large bowl; reserve 1/2 cup of the cooking liquid. In a skillet, sauté garlic in olive oil. Add tomatoes, and 1/2 tsp. salt/pepper. As the tomatoes soften, smash them with a fork or potato masher. Cook until the tomatoes form a sauce, about 5-10 minutes. Transfer tomato sauce to pasta bowl and toss to combine. Add basil leaves and mozzarella. Stir to combine. Add 1/4 cup of the reserve pasta water. Toss, and add the other 1/4 cup until the pasta is moist.

**Aim for 25-35g of fiber a day**

That’s the magic number to reap all of the health benefits. Soluble fiber (the kind found in fruits, beans, nuts, barley, and oats), lowers LDL cholesterol and helps to regular blood sugar. Insoluble fiber prevents constipation and balances pH in the intestines.

Find it in vegetables, fruit skin & grains.

Try these whole grains in your next meal. Not only does whole-grains add more fiber to your diet, they also contain more vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and protein than refined grains.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whole Grain</th>
<th>Calories per 1/2 cup</th>
<th>Fiber</th>
<th>Protein</th>
<th>Tasty Tip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spelt</td>
<td>123 calories</td>
<td>4g</td>
<td>5g</td>
<td>Great for gluten-sensitivities. Try spelt pasta for a nuttier change from whole wheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat Berries</td>
<td>113 calories</td>
<td>3g</td>
<td>5g</td>
<td>NutriCat loves cooked wheat berries with mushrooms. (Google Ina Garten’s wheat berry pilaf recipe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn</td>
<td>59 per cooked ear</td>
<td>1g</td>
<td>2g</td>
<td>Combine corn, chopped avocado, &amp; fresh salsa for a party-pleaser dip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polenta</td>
<td>122 calories</td>
<td>2g</td>
<td>3g</td>
<td>Buy tube polenta, slice, and bake until crispy on the outside. Top with marinara sauce and parmesan cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popcorn</td>
<td>31 per cup, popped</td>
<td>1g</td>
<td>1g</td>
<td>Toss with 1 tbsp. Olive Oil. Add to taste: chili powder, dill weed, pepper, lemon zest, garlic powder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild Rice</td>
<td>83 calories</td>
<td>2g</td>
<td>3g</td>
<td>Combine wild and brown rice for a twist on pilaf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amaranth</td>
<td>126 calories</td>
<td>3g</td>
<td>5g</td>
<td>Use amaranth flour for your next batch of cookies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barley</td>
<td>97 calories</td>
<td>3g</td>
<td>2g</td>
<td>Use hulled barley in chicken noodle soup for a heartier helping of this favorite soup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinoa</td>
<td>111 calories</td>
<td>3g</td>
<td>4g</td>
<td>Quinoa is a complete protein, use as you would rice or pasta for a cold salad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steel-cut oats</td>
<td>100 calories</td>
<td>3g</td>
<td>3g</td>
<td>Place oats in a slow cooker overnight for breakfast the next day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>