Which Foods We Eat and When May Affect Cardiovascular Health

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Most people know that a healthy diet is key to maintaining good cardiovascular health. Now, a new statement published by the American Heart Association (AHA) in the journal Circulation suggests that for a healthy heart, not only should we eat nutritious foods, but also we must plan for the right time to dine on meals and snacks, The Charlotte Observer reports.

According to the overview, eating at scheduled mealtimes could help our bodies break down food more efficiently. The AHA statement also recommended that we eat meals earlier in the day. That means not skipping a healthy breakfast. (Study authors noted that up to 30 percent of American adults don't eat this first meal of the day.)

The report cited several studies that showed meal timing and frequency were linked to risk factors for heart disease and stroke, obesity, high blood pressure, cholesterol, unbalanced blood glucose levels, insulin resistance and reduced insulin sensitivity.

"We suggest eating mindfully, by paying attention to planning both what you eat and when you eat meals and snacks, to combat emotional eating," said Marie-Pierre St-Onge, PhD, writing group chair and an associate professor of nutritional medicine at Columbia University, one of the study's authors. "Many people find that emotions can trigger eating episodes when they are not hungry, which often leads to eating too many calories from foods that have low nutritional value."

Currently, the AHA doesn't provide hard-and-fast rules about meal timing or about how often to eat, and study authors noted that there's no one-size-fits-all prescription for eating healthy.

The association does stress, however, that no matter when you choose to eat, to protect the heart, it's key to include plenty of fruits and veggies, whole grains, poultry and fish in your diet while limiting red meat, salt and foods high in fat and added sugars.

Click here to learn more about healthy eating for heart disease.

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