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Painful kidney stones may be preventable. Proper hydration is key.

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- What is metabolic syndrome?
- Why is the skin on my neck and upper chest always red?
- Does cracking knuckles cause arthritis?

Reduce Your Risk of Atherosclerosis

Making at-home, heart-healthy meals can be deliciously easy, fast and affordable.

Atherosclerosis, also known as hardening of the arteries, is a disease in which deposits of fatty substances, cholesterol, calcium and fibrin (the protein that forms a blood clot) clump together and form what's called plaque. That accumulation can restrict blood flow.

Lack of good blood flow can have serious and even life-threatening consequences. Any artery in the body can be affected.

Different diseases develop depending on which artery is blocked. For example, "coronary heart disease" refers to the narrowing of heart arteries, which can damage the heart; "carotid artery disease" is when arteries on either side of the neck are affected and inhibit blood flow to the brain; and "peripheral artery disease" occurs when plaque builds up in the arteries that supply blood to the legs, arms, and pelvis.

Risk for atherosclerosis is reduced through physical activity, smoking cessation, weight management, and a heart-healthy diet.

"Preparing your own meals allows you to reduce sodium and saturated fat intake, and to focus on poly and monounsaturated fats, such as choosing olive oil over butter for cooking," explains registered dietitian Nancee Jaffe, Division of Digestive Diseases, UCLA Medical Center.

Create a Heart-healthy Kitchen

Stocking your kitchen with the right ingredients makes heart-healthy meal preparation all the easier. Jaffe recommends including plenty of high-fiber foods, such as beans,



Cooking together and sharing meals fosters healthier eating.

lentils, fruits and vegetables, as well whole grains, nuts and seeds. Fat choices also matter, so keep the following tips in mind on your next shopping trip:

- ➔ Instead of regular milk, try almond or rice milk fortified with vitamin D.
- ➔ Cut down on full-fat milk by replacing it with low-fat or skim milk.
- ➔ Choose monounsaturated fats, such as olive oil or canola oil, instead of butter for cooking.
- ➔ Eat fish high in omega-3 fatty acids (salmon, tuna, sardines).
- ➔ Avoid (or eat fewer) high-fat foods from animals (meats, eggs, full-fat dairy products).

Making Homemade Meals

If your idea of making dinner is making restaurant reservations or ordering take-out, you're short-changing yourself on the many benefits of cooking at home. When you do it yourself, you don't necessarily have to do it all yourself. Cooking can be more fun as a communal act. If you're single, consider starting a weekly themed potluck party based on a heart-healthy menu. Ideas, recipes and cooking tips abound at www.Heart.org.

Living with a partner? Cooking together can create better bonds with your loved one and inspire you both to eat more healthfully. Even grandkids can benefit from joining you in the kitchen. Research has shown that children (and probably adults, too) are

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Prolonged Use of PPIs Questioned

These acid reflux-reducing medications are associated with serious health problems.

Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) are taken to reduce the pain of heartburn, peptic ulcers, and to relieve gastroesophageal reflux disease, better known as GERD. Once available only by prescription, they are now sold over-the-counter under such brand names as Nexium, Prevacid and Prilosec. They are generally meant to be taken for just a few weeks, unless otherwise directed by a doctor. Studies, however, suggest rampant overuse.

PPIs shut down acid production in stomach cells and thus reduce acid reflux. The acid not only causes a burning sensation; it can also damage the lining of the esophagus. Reducing acid can protect the lining of the esophagus, but overuse of the drug can cause damage elsewhere in the body.

“For those who take over-the-counter PPIs, I advise having a frank discussion with your physician regarding whether or not you need to remain on the medications,” says integrative gastroenterologist Marvin Singh, MD, UCLA Vatche and Tamar Division of Digestive Diseases. “There is definitely concern regarding some of the recent published studies associating increased risk of dementia and kidney disease, as well as vitamin B12 deficiency, increased risk of gastrointestinal infections, among others.”

PPIs Disrupt Microbiome Diversity

Research from the Mayo Clinic showed that people who regularly take PPIs have less diversity in their gut bacteria (also referred to as the gut microbiome). The gut contains trillions of bacteria that do a variety of helpful jobs. For example, gut bacteria



PPIs relieve heartburn but should only be used short-term.

aid in digestion, promote vitamin absorption, help regulate the immune system, and may play a role in mood stabilization.

But PPIs reduce gut acid, which affects the bacteria living in the gut. Disturbing the diversity and/or the balance of gut bacteria can pose health risks. For example, overuse of PPIs can trigger

serious infections caused by a proliferation of the bacteria *clostridium difficile*. The inability to properly absorb vitamin B12 can lead to fatigue and neurological dysfunctions. Newer studies suggest even more troubling outcomes.

Association With Increased Dementia Risk and Kidney Disease

A 2016 study published in *JAMA Neurology* and conducted at the German Center for Neurodegenerative Diseases in Bonn, Germany, found that regular users of PPIs had a 44 percent increased risk of dementia compared with those who did not take the medication. Study participants were mostly women in their 80s. It’s important to know that the conclusions were based on statistical analyses, not biological studies. “To evaluate and establish direct cause-and-effect relationships between PPI use and incident dementia in the elderly, randomized, prospective clinical trials are needed,” the study concludes.

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University quantified the association between PPI use and the incidence of chronic kidney disease in the general population. They analyzed data from more than 10 thousand participants, followed for 14 years. They compared

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Before reaching for a PPI, try these strategies:

- **Avoid** food and drink that trigger gastric upset
- **Don't** overeat
- **Lose** weight if you are overweight
- **Avoid** sleeping on a full stomach
- **Try** slippery elm lozenges or ginger tea
- **Practice** relaxation techniques, such as meditation

self-reported users of PPIs with those who did not use them and found a slight increased risk for kidney disease in PPI users.

“While these are not definitive studies and further research is required to confirm these suspected associations, it is not unreasonable to use this opportunity to consider other alternative therapies and provide recommendations that may be able to treat our patients as well or better,” says Dr. Singh.

Dousing the Fire of Gastric Upset

PPIs are of use to a limited population for a limited time and are best reserved for acute problems, according to Dr. Singh. After the flare-up subsides, other alternatives should be sought.

“I focus on dietary modifications and lifestyle changes while using combinations of more natural medications including, but not limited to, DGL (Deglycyrrhizinated licorice), slippery elm, and even ginger in some cases, to help control symptoms,” says Dr. Singh. “There may be some instances where a PPI is the best or only treatment strategy for a particular problem, but that is a decision that should be personalized and discussed between patient and physician.”

Because anxiety plays a role in gut problems, meditation has also been shown to be helpful in reducing symptoms. The UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center website (marc.ucla.edu) offers free guided meditations online. ■

Heart-healthy Eating—cont. from page 1

more likely to eat vegetables that they have helped to prepare.

Saving Time and Money

Save time with one of the many companies that deliver pre-portioned fresh ingredients along with easy step-by-step recipes. Many meals are designed with just a few ingredients and can be prepared in under an hour. There are two-person plans

as well as family plans. While it may sound expensive, per person meal prices cost around \$10, less than you'd spend in a sit-down restaurant. Some services offer vegetarian options, which tend to be lower in calories (around 500), whereas the conventional meals hover around 700 calories, which can be too high for some people.

Most companies don't require a membership, so you can try a meal or two without making a big commitment. Search "meal boxes" online to check out the offerings. Martha Stewart, Blue Apron and Hello Fresh are

among the major brands offering the service.

You can also save time (and money) by having items readily at hand. For example, one baked chicken can be used for several meals. Chop or shred leftover chicken and use it to top a salad, make tacos, or a sandwich. Keep boiled eggs in the fridge for a fast snack or to make egg salad. Likewise, washed and chopped veggies and fruits can serve as quick ingredients for omelets, smoothies, or casseroles.

Cooking your own meals will help you become more aware of what a heart-healthy meal means. The key is to have a meal plan. Designate a specific time when you will plan weekly meals and then create your shopping list. Get started with one of these heart-healthy recipes. ■

Ragout of White Beans and Chard with Eggs



INGREDIENTS

- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1½ cups onion, chopped
- 1 oz (scant ¼ cup) sliced prosciutto, trimmed of fat, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ tsp crushed red pepper
- 1 (14.5-oz) can no-salt-added, diced tomatoes
- 1 (15-oz) can white beans (preferably low-sodium), such as navy, Great Northern or cannellini, drained and rinsed thoroughly
- ½ cup water
- 8 oz Swiss chard
- Pepper to taste
- 4 eggs
- Smoked or regular paprika

TIP

Cured pork products enhance the flavor of both beans and greens; prosciutto is a lean choice, and a small amount goes a long way in flavoring the dish. You can omit it if you prefer to make a vegetarian meal.

STEPS

1. Heat oil in large skillet over medium heat. Add onion and prosciutto; cook, stirring often, until softened, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and crushed red pepper; cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 20 seconds.
2. Add tomatoes, beans, and water; bring to a simmer. Cover and simmer briskly for 15 minutes to allow flavors to meld.
3. Meanwhile, separate chard stems from leaves; reserve stems for another use. You should have about 4 cups lightly packed leaves. Wash leaves thoroughly and dry; chop coarsely.
4. When beans have simmered 15 minutes, stir in chard. Cook, uncovered, stirring often, just until chard has wilted, 1 to 2 minutes. Season with pepper.
5. Make 4 indentations in bean mixture. Carefully crack an egg into each indentation. Cover skillet and cook just until eggs are set, 5 to 8 minutes. Sprinkle with paprika.
6. To serve, using a wide spatula, transfer an egg to each plate. Spoon additional ragout around each egg.

YIELD: 4 servings (1 cup ragout and one egg). **NUTRITION, PER SERVING:** 339 calories, 13g total fat, 3g sat fat, 22g protein, 37g carbs, 11g fiber, 250mg cholesterol, 456mg sodium

Roasted Salmon With Herbs and Yogurt



INGREDIENTS

- 2½ lb salmon
- ½ tsp sea salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- 1 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tsp dried oregano
- 1 lemon
- 1 cup plain, nonfat Greek yogurt
- ½ cucumber, finely chopped
- 3 Tbsp minced shallots
- 2 Tbsp fresh parsley, chopped (see tip)
- 2 Tbsp fresh mint leaves, chopped (see tip)
- 2 Tbsp fresh dill weed, chopped (see tip)
- 2 Tbsp fresh basil, chopped (see tip)
- Pinch crushed red pepper

TIP

If you don't have fresh herbs, substitute one teaspoon of dried herbs for every tablespoon of fresh herbs.

STEPS

1. Preheat oven to 325°F. Line a shallow baking pan with parchment paper and place salmon in pan; sprinkle with salt and black pepper. Drizzle salmon with olive oil and rub into fish. Sprinkle with oregano.
2. Roast 25–30 minutes or until fish flakes easily.
3. Remove zest from lemon and set aside; halve lemon and squeeze over salmon.
4. Top salmon with yogurt; sprinkle with lemon zest and remaining ingredients.

YIELD: 6 servings. **NUTRITION, PER SERVING:** 406 calories, 23g total fat, 5g sat fat, 42g protein, 4g carbs, 1g fiber, 109mg cholesterol, 369mg sodium