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# 4 Heart Healthy Recipe Swaps to Try Today

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Did you know that you can easily swap ingredients in your favorite recipes to make them healthier for your heart? Here's how you can do it and why it matters.

## Why should I use heart healthy swaps?

Food choices matter, especially when it comes to heart health. "Heart disease is the leading cause of death of both men and women in the United States, but many

outcomes can be changed based on how we eat, move, and live,” explains [Kelsey Lorencz, RDN](#), of Graciously Nourished.

The foods we choose to eat, and the ones we choose to avoid, can have a direct impact on the health of our heart. “Research has shown specific dietary patterns can lower the risk of heart disease by over 30 percent,” says [E.A. Stewart, RD](#), an integrative registered dietitian in San Diego. For this reason, focusing on swapping in beneficial foods in replacement of ingredients that may increase the risk of heart disease is one of the easiest steps you can take in the fight against future disease.

Here are some swaps that can help.

**Swap out sour cream for Greek yogurt.** When it comes to improving heart health, reducing intake of saturated fat in the diet is key. The [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) recommends keeping your intake of saturated fat to less than 10 percent of total daily calories. To meet this goal, try swapping out high fat dairy ingredients such as sour cream and whipping cream for lower fat alternatives like low-fat Greek yogurt.

“Plain Greek yogurt can be used in a 1:1 ratio for any recipe that calls for sour cream, mayonnaise, or even heavy whipping cream to reduce saturated fat intake,” explains Andrew Akhaphong, MS, RD, LD, of [Mackenthun’s Fine Foods](#). Not only does this swap preserve the same flavor and texture of the recipe, but it provides a huge savings when it comes to saturated fat. Replacing one cup of heavy cream with one cup of nonfat, plain Greek yogurt can cut out 55 grams of saturated fat!

**Swap out the meat with plant-based alternatives.** Most nutrition experts agree that reducing your intake of high fat animal meats and swapping them for plant-based alternatives can go a long way in improving heart health. But that swap isn’t always easy if you are a meat lover.

Thankfully, there are ways to still eat what you love while improving the nutritional content of the recipe. “Using mushrooms to replace or extend ground beef in a recipe works well because they provide that umami or savory flavor that beef has, and when chopped finely, have the same texture as ground beef,” explains culinary nutritionist [Laura M. Ali](#), MS, RD. “In addition to reducing the amount of saturated fat in your meals, you still enjoy the flavor of the ground beef, plus get additional potassium and magnesium from the mushrooms.”

To make this swap work, Ali recommends using finely chopped baby bella or small white mushrooms that have been sautéed in olive oil until softened. “Mix 1 cup of cooked, chopped mushrooms into a pound of ground beef or use mushroom crumbles to completely replace ground beef in a “meat sauce.”

Mushrooms aren't the only meat alternative you can try. "Mix in a can of black beans with half the amount of ground beef for dishes like tacos, enchiladas, and even spaghetti," shares Lorencz. This swap is a great way to reduce saturated fat while boosting the fiber and protein of a recipe, maintaining flavor while enhancing the heart health benefits.

**Replace the butter with mashed avocado in baked goods.** In baked goods and desserts such as cookies, replacing butter in a 1:1 ratio with fresh mashed avocado often works out really well and can offer health benefits. This swap not only reduces the overall calories of the recipe, but by replacing the saturated fat in butter with the "good" unsaturated fat in avocado, you can favorably improve the nutrition profile of the recipe.

According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, replacing saturated fats with unsaturated fats can reduce LDL (bad) cholesterol levels in the blood, an important factor in heart disease risk.

**Swap out refined grains for whole grains.** White flour pasta and white rice are staples in many dishes, but these quick digesting carbohydrates aren't doing any favors for heart health. "One recent [study](#) found eating seven servings of refined grains per day was associated with a 33 percent greater risk for heart disease," shares Stewart.

Simply swapping these for whole grain alternatives can provide the same flavor and texture while protecting your heart in the process. Stewart recommends replacing white flour pastas with pasta made from lentils or chickpeas instead. "Lentils and chickpeas are low in saturated fat and high in fiber, which may help lower blood cholesterol and support gut health."

When it comes to white rice, Akhaphong recommends using bulgur as a suitable swap. Bulgur, which cooks the same as white rice, is a rich source of the dietary fiber beta-glucans—which has been shown to reduce LDL cholesterol between [five to ten percent](#) when consumed daily.

*This information is for educational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. You should not use this information to diagnose or treat a health problem or condition. Always check with your doctor before changing your diet, altering your sleep habits, taking supplements, or starting a new fitness routine.*

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