

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

A Cardiologist Says This Is the One Vegetable Everyone Should Eat for Better Heart Health

A cardiologist explains why this versatile veggie should be a staple in your weekly meals.

By Kirsten Nunez

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Rich in monounsaturated fats, fiber, potassium, and antioxidants, avocado supports heart health by lowering LDL cholesterol, reducing blood pressure, and fighting inflammation.
- Avocado's soluble fiber binds to cholesterol in the digestive tract, helping the body remove it naturally and further reducing heart disease risk.
- Versatile and mild in flavor, avocado can be easily added to salads, sandwiches, smoothies, and dressings to boost your daily intake of heart-friendly nutrients.

Eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables is one of the best things you can do for your heart. That's because these foods are high in heart-healthy nutrients, including fiber, minerals, and antioxidants. They're also naturally low in saturated ("bad") fats and sodium, which can have negative effects on the heart. However, there's one vegetable that's particularly beneficial for cardiac health, and it's more impressive than you may think. Read on to learn a cardiologist's pick for the best vegetable for heart health, along with ways to eat it at home.

Best Vegetable for Heart Health

According to Dariush Mozaffarian, MD, DrPH, cardiologist and director of Food is Medicine Institute at the Friedman School at Tufts University, one vegetable wins in the realm of cardiac health: avocado. Though *technically* a fruit, avocado is commonly eaten and prepared like a vegetable, and it's highly beneficial for your heart.

This is partly due to its rich content of unsaturated fatty acids, or "good" fats. "Unsaturated fats come in two major classes, monounsaturated and polyunsaturated," explains Dr. Mozaffarian. Both types can help manage blood cholesterol levels, a key component of healthy heart function. According to Dr. Mozaffarian avocados contain mostly monounsaturated fatty acids, which help decrease LDL ("bad") cholesterol[1]. This is a noteworthy effect, as high LDL cholesterol levels can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke, per the experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention[2]. Avocado also provides fiber; just half an avocado satisfies 20 percent of your daily fiber needs[3]. This includes soluble fiber, which binds to cholesterol in the intestine and removes it from the body via stool[4]. This reduces cholesterol absorption in the body, thereby supporting healthy blood cholesterol levels and lowering the risk of heart disease.

Plus, avocado contains potassium, an essential mineral for heart health. "Potassium lowers blood pressure and helps offset the harms of sodium," shares Dr. Mozaffarian. (ICYDK, excess sodium can increase blood pressure, or the force of blood flow against your artery walls.) This can help manage or prevent high blood pressure, or hypertension, another risk factor of cardiovascular disease.

To top it off, avocado is teeming with antioxidants. These beneficial compounds fight oxidative stress and inflammation, two factors that also contribute to heart disease. Antioxidants also prevent LDL cholesterol from oxidizing[5], a process that would otherwise promote plaque buildup in arteries, causing atherosclerosis[6]. If such buildup occurs, it can prevent proper blood flow and lead to heart issues like heart attack and stroke—but antioxidants, like those in avocado, may help reduce the risk.

How to Eat More Avocado

Equal parts creamy and mild, avocado can be used in many ways. Do your heart a favor and try these delicious [avocado recipes](#), below.

Mash It Into Guacamole

You can't go wrong with a batch of [homemade guacamole](#). Serve it with tortilla chips, burritos, or sliced vegetables for a boost of fiber and healthy fats.

Make a dressing

Make a creamy dressing sans dairy with avocado. Simply toss it in a blender or food processor with spices, lemon juice, and heart-healthy oil (such as [olive oil](#)), then blitz until smooth. Pair it with a simple salad, like this [Grilled Romaine Salad with Avocado Dressing](#).

Toss in salads

No time to make dressing from scratch? Add chunks, slices, or even half an avocado to your next salad or grain bowl. Try our [Grilled Chicken and Corn Salad with Avocado](#) or our [Avocado Grain Bowl with Ginger Dressing](#).

Use it in smoothies

Thanks to its rich and creamy texture, avocado can help thicken [fruit smoothies](#). Plus, it has a relatively mild flavor, so it can pair well with a variety of ingredients.

Layer it in Burgers or Sandwiches

For a heart-healthy sandwich upgrade, add a layer of sliced avocado. It's especially tasty in [turkey burgers](#) and our [Fancy Tomato Sandwiches](#).

Sources

Real Simple is committed to using high-quality, reputable sources, including peer-reviewed studies, to support the facts in our articles. Read our editorial guidelines to learn more about how we fact check our content for accuracy.

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