

News Release From:
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Check for the American Heart Association's Heart-Check

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February is National Heart Health month. It is a good time take inventory of what we eat to see if it is good for us. We could spend hours studying food labels. But the American Heart Association (AHA) has made it easier than that – check for their Heart-Check mark on the packages of food that are the better options.

The Heart-Check mark is a white check inside a red heart. It is accompanied by the American Heart Association name. When this mark is on a food package, it means that the food's nutrition facts have been reviewed and found within the limits they have set. These nutrition requirements are based on what research has found helps promote heart health.

According to the AHA web site (www.heart.org), in order to bear this symbol on the package, certification requirements are as follows for a single serving of the certified food:

Total fat: less than 6.5 g

Saturated fat: 1 g or less and 15% or less calories from saturated fat

Trans fat: Less than 0.5 g (per label serving)

Cholesterol: 20 mg or less

Sodium: 480 mg or less (per label serving)

These are the nutrients that should be limited since they have a negative effect on the circulatory system.

But to get the Heart-Check mark, the food must also have something of value that benefits or promotes health. So to be certified, the food must also contain 10% or more of the Daily Value of at least one of the six macronutrients. These are the nutrients we need in larger amounts and are found on the Nutrition Facts label. They include Vitamin A, Vitamin C, iron, calcium, protein, and dietary fiber.

If you are already watching the Nutrition Facts labels on the foods you eat for these important factors in a healthy eating plan, continue to do so. But if you find all these numbers overwhelming or too time consuming to study, a quick and easy way to get started on a healthier path is to check for the American Heart Association's Heart-Check mark.

The American Heart Association's web site has a wealth of information; for example, under the Getting Healthy Nutrition Center tab, there are recipes, heart smart shopping ideas and how to pick a heart healthy place to eat out. For more information on heart healthy eating ideas, or any other topic, contact me, Janet Hackert, Regional Nutrition Specialist, at 660-425-6434 or HackertJ@missouri.edu or your local University of Missouri Extension office.