

# American Heart Month

## February 2025

Non-Metro New Mexico Area Agency on Aging

Nutrition Corner

The month of February is a wonderful time to bring awareness to heart health. The word “heart” can be used in many different ways: to refer to a person’s character (“Grandma has a good heart.”), being in the center (“They live in the heart of the city.”), or having courage, determination, or hope (“You’re doing great, don’t lose heart.”). However, this month let’s focus on the number one meaning of the word “heart”: **the organ in your chest that sends blood to other parts of your body.**

### Heart-Healthy Living

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the US for both men and women. However, you can take action to protect your heart and stay healthy.

1. Get enough quality sleep. Lack of sleep or low-quality sleep increases your risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, and other medical conditions.
2. Eat healthy. A balanced eating plan can help lower high blood pressure and improve your cholesterol levels.
3. Stop smoking. Smoke damages your heart and blood vessels.
4. Maintain a healthy weight. Having a healthy weight can help prevent and control many diseases and conditions.
5. Be more active. Physical activity helps lower your risk of heart disease and stroke.
6. Control cholesterol. High cholesterol can increase your risk of developing heart disease.
7. Manage blood sugar levels. Stable blood sugar levels are important especially for people with diabetes or at risk of developing diabetes.
8. Manage stress. Healthy coping strategies help improve your emotional and physical health.
9. Control your blood pressure. High blood pressure can cause serious health problems.
10. Practice self-care & find social support. Daily acts of self-care and positive social support help you to stick to heart-healthy habits.

For more information, visit the website:  
[National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/)

### Heart-Healthy Food

Foods for your heart-healthy eating plan:

- Fruits and Vegetables
- Whole Grains
- Healthy Proteins (lean meat or legumes)
- Nonfat or Low-fat Dairy
- Unsaturated Fats and Oils (nuts, seeds, avocados, oils, and seafood)



### Foods to Avoid to Protect Your Heart

- ⇒ High-Fat Dairy Products
- ⇒ Fatty Meat
- ⇒ Processed Meats
- ⇒ Processed Foods
- ⇒ Food and Beverages with Added Sugar
- ⇒ Food High in Sodium
- ⇒ Alcohol
- ⇒ Partially Hydrogenated Fats and Oils

"Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food."

- Hippocrates

## Apple and Walnut Chicken Salad with Green Salad

From the American Heart Association



Serves: 4

### **Ingredients for Chicken Salad:**

- 1/4 cup fat-free, plain yogurt
- 2 Tablespoons light mayonnaise
- 1/4 teaspoon dried Italian seasoning, dried thyme, or dried basil, crumbled (or a combination of thyme and basil)
- 2 cups skinless, shredded chicken breast **OR** 20 ounces canned, salt-free white meat chicken (drained)
- 3 tablespoons chopped, unsalted walnuts
- 1/2 cup halved, seedless grapes **OR** 1/2 cup chopped, dried unsweetened fruit, such as prunes or cranberries
- 1 red (sweeter) or green (more tart) apple, finely chopped

### **Ingredients for Green Salad:**

- 1 head lettuce (green leaf, red leaf or romaine), cut into bite-size pieces
- 1/2 medium cucumber (peeled if desired, chopped)
- 1 large tomato (chopped)
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil or canola oil
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar, white wine vinegar, or fresh lemon juice

### **Directions:**

#### *Chicken Salad*

In a large bowl, using a fork, stir together the yogurt, mayonnaise, and Italian seasoning until combined. Add the chicken, chopped apple, grapes, and walnuts. Stir to combine.

#### *Green Salad*

In a large bowl, combine the chopped lettuce, cucumber, and tomato. In a small bowl, whisk together the oil and vinegar. Pour over the salad, tossing to coat. Transfer the salad greens to plates. Spoon the chicken salad onto the greens.

**Cooking Tip:** If you prefer sweeter flavors, grab a red apple, such as a Gala or Fuji. If sour-tart, tangy flavors are more your thing, pick a green one, like a Granny Smith. Chopped apple usually turns brown very quickly, but the yogurt in the chicken salad will prevent that from happening.

**Keep it Healthy:** Combining a little light mayonnaise with fat-free, plain yogurt is a great way to create a healthier creamy salad dressing.

**Tip:** When nuts are on sale, buy more than you need. Freeze them in an airtight, resealable freezer bag for up to six months

## DASH Diet Named "Best Heart-Healthy Diet"

The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet is a flexible and balanced eating plan that is easy to follow. The DASH plan not only helps prevent high blood pressure but also helps prevent or control diabetes, high cholesterol, improves gut health, inflammation, arthritis, brain health, mental health, and menopause. The plan does not require any special food but just simply recommends:

- ⇒ Eating vegetables, fruits and whole grains
- ⇒ Include nonfat or low-fat fish, poultry, or dairy products.
- ⇒ Include beans, nuts, and healthy oils
- ⇒ Limit foods high in saturated fats (fatty meats, full-fat dairy products, and tropical oils)
- ⇒ Limit salt, sweets, sugar-sweetened beverages, and alcohol



### Heart Fun Facts

1. Your heart beats about 100,000 times per day.
2. A human heart weighs less than a pound, while a blue whale's heart weighs more than 1,000 pounds.
3. The beating sound of your heart is caused by the valves opening and closing.
4. The average heart pumps about 2,000 gallons of blood per day.
5. Your left lung is slightly smaller than your right to make room for your heart.
6. A joke a day may help keep the doctor away, as laughing can improve heart health by lowering stress and relaxing blood vessels.
7. Your heart pumps blood through about 60,000 miles of blood vessels. That amount of vessels could circle around the Earth TWICE!