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Gifts for your Heart

The closer the holidays get, the higher the pressure goes. Pressure for gifts, parties, family get-togethers all rise, and blood pressure often goes up too. Ouch! You may or may not be able to handle the other stresses, but you can certainly fit a lot of gifts for your heart into the planning. In fact, they can go right into the middle of every meal you eat! No, not the centerpiece of the table, but yes, the centerpiece of your plate, that's where the fruits and vegetables belong.

Whether or not you manage to cut back on the salt this holiday season, work on adding plenty of fruits and vegetables. The potassium in root veggies and green leafy vegetables is an important part of the blood pressure balance. Aim for 4, 5 or more servings a day. It doesn't matter if they're fresh, frozen or canned, although the ones with no salt added will be most effective. Fruits that grew on vines, such as melons, are other good sources of potassium. Yes, cantaloupe has more than bananas! Aim for 4 to 5 or more servings of fruit each day. Your heart will be very happy!

The magnesium in nuts, beans, cereals and spinach is another big part of the healthy balance. Instead of a cream cheese dip for the party, make a bean and salsa dip. Have a handful of unsalted nuts instead of a bag of chips. Your heart will love it!

The third big gift for your heart is more calcium. As long as they're low fat, most kinds of dairy products will be your best sources. At least 2 to 3 servings a day will help

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relax your heart. Use evaporated skim milk instead of whole for that creamy eggnog, and fat-free plain yogurt instead of sour cream in the casserole. If you cook with low fat cheeses, add them at the very end of the cooking time. High heat makes them tough, so handle delicately.

This holiday season plan your meals to be nice to your heart. Fill half of every plate with vegetables, use fruits for dessert, get enough low fat dairy. Those will be the best gifts your heart could get.