

# Beating the Odds

## A Heart-Healthy Diet for Arrhythmia

Arrhythmia, a condition characterised by an irregular heartbeat, can disrupt the normal rhythm of the heart, leading to symptoms like palpitations, dizziness, and fatigue. While medical treatments and lifestyle changes are essential in managing this condition, diet also plays a significant role in promoting heart health. Certain nutrients help regulate heartbeat, reduce inflammation, and

prevent complications such as high blood pressure and stroke.

In this edition of *Feeding Heart & Soul*, we explore the ideal diet for arrhythmia patients, highlighting essential nutrients, recommended food choices, and dietary habits that support overall cardiovascular well-being.



### Heart-Healthy Nutrients for Arrhythmia Patients

#### 1 Magnesium-Rich Foods

Magnesium is crucial for maintaining a normal heart rhythm by supporting the electrical impulses that regulate heartbeat. A deficiency in magnesium can lead to palpitations, muscle cramps, and other irregularities. To increase magnesium intake, patients should incorporate leafy greens like spinach, kale, and lettuce, which provide essential vitamins and minerals.

Nuts and seeds such as almonds, cashews, and pumpkin seeds are also excellent sources of magnesium, offering heart-healthy fats. Whole grains, including brown rice, quinoa, and oats, contribute to a steady heart rhythm while providing necessary fiber. Additionally, legumes like black beans, lentils, chickpeas & soybean curd (tofu) serve as nutrient-dense, plant-based protein sources that support cardiovascular health.

#### 2 Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Additionally, Omega-3 fatty acids are well-known for their anti-inflammatory properties and their ability to support heart health. These healthy fats help improve blood circulation and stabilise heart rhythms, making them a valuable addition to the diet of arrhythmia patients.

Fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, and tuna are among the best sources of omega-3s and should be consumed at least twice a week. For those who prefer plant-based sources, flaxseeds and chia seeds can be added to smoothies, oatmeal, or yogurt for a heart-healthy boost. Walnuts also provide a good balance of healthy fats and antioxidants, while fortified eggs serve as an alternative source of omega-3s for individuals who do not consume fish.



#### 3 Antioxidant-Rich Foods

Oxidative stress can contribute to heart disease, making antioxidants essential for protecting the heart from damage. A diet rich in antioxidants helps prevent cellular stress and supports overall cardiovascular health. Including a variety of colourful fruits and vegetables in daily meals is an easy way to increase antioxidant intake. Fruits such as grapes, blueberries, prunes and blackberries are packed with flavonoids, of which offer protective benefits to fight against heart diseases and cancer. Dark chocolate with at least 70% cocoa contains polyphenols that contribute to heart health when consumed in moderation. Tomatoes, red bell peppers and beetroot are excellent sources of lycopene, which has been linked to a reduced risk of heart disease.



### Foods to Avoid

#### 1 Excessive Caffeine and Alcohol

Both caffeine and alcohol can act as stimulants that may trigger arrhythmia episodes, especially in sensitive individuals. Excessive caffeine intake from coffee, tea, chocolate drink, or sodas can lead to palpitations, while alcohol may disrupt electrolyte balance and interfere with heart function. Limiting these beverages or choosing healthier alternatives such as low fat milk or barley water can help maintain a stable heart rhythm.

#### 2 Good Hydration

Proper hydration is also essential for heart function, as dehydration can lead to electrolyte imbalances that may trigger arrhythmias. To maintain optimal hydration, individuals should drink plenty of water throughout the day, aiming for at least eight cups (two liters) daily. Sugary beverages, sodas, and excessive caffeine should be limited, as they can contribute to dehydration.

#### 3 Processed and High-Sodium Foods

A high sodium intake is a leading contributor to high blood pressure, which can worsen arrhythmia symptoms. Many processed foods contain hidden sodium, making them a less-than-ideal choice for heart health. Patients should avoid processed meats, canned foods, fast food, instant noodles, and salty snacks, opting instead for fresh, whole foods prepared with natural herbs and spices.

#### 4 Sugary and Highly Processed Carbohydrates

Excess sugar and highly processed carbohydrates can cause blood sugar spikes, leading to weight gain and increased inflammation—both of which negatively impact heart health. Reducing the consumption of cakes, chocolate, candy, pastries, sweetened beverages, and fizzy drinks can help regulate blood sugar levels and promote a more stable heart rhythm. Whole grains, fruits, and vegetables are better alternatives that provide necessary nutrients without causing dramatic fluctuations in blood sugar.



#### 5 Saturated and Trans Fats

Unhealthy fats, such as saturated and trans fats, raise bad cholesterol levels and contribute to heart disease. Fried foods, fast food, processed snacks, hardened margarine, shortening and commercially baked goods are common sources of these harmful fats. Instead, individuals with arrhythmia should focus on consuming heart-healthy fats such as those found in olive oil, avocados, and nuts, which support cardiovascular function without increasing cholesterol levels.



#### 6 Meal Planning

Meal planning is another key aspect of maintaining a balanced diet for arrhythmia management. Preparing meals in advance helps individuals avoid unhealthy fast-food choices while ensuring a well-rounded intake of heart-supporting nutrients. Including a variety of colourful fruits and vegetables in daily meals provides a diverse range of vitamins and minerals. A balanced diet should also incorporate adequate protein, healthy fats, and wholegrains to maintain stable energy levels. Reading food labels carefully can help individuals identify and avoid hidden sources of sodium and sugar, further promoting heart health.

By following these dietary guidelines, arrhythmia patients can support their heart health, enhance their overall well-being, and reduce the risk of complications. As always, it is advisable

to consult a healthcare provider or a registered dietitian before making significant dietary changes. Stay heart-conscious and nourish your body wisely!