

# American Heart Association Issues 2026 Dietary Guidance

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*Prioritizing "Plant-Forward" Eating for Lifelong Heart and Brain Health*

DALLAS, TX, UNITED STATES, April 7, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The American Heart Association has officially released its 2026 evidence-based dietary guidance, providing a science-driven roadmap to combat cardiovascular disease—the leading contributor to global mortality. The updated recommendations emphasize a "plant-forward" approach, shifting the focus from restrictive dieting to a flexible, minimally processed eating pattern that supports both heart and brain health.

## The "Big Picture" Approach

The 2026 Guidance moves away from isolated nutrient counting, instead encouraging a holistic view of daily consumption. According to Dr. Amit Khera, a volunteer expert for the American Heart Association, the latest science reaffirms that the best way to reduce cardiovascular risk is through a sustainable, high-quality eating pattern.

"The guidance is an overview of the latest science, reaffirming that a flexible, minimally processed eating pattern is the best way to reduce cardiovascular risk," says Dr. Khera. "Focus on the big picture—add more veggies and fruits, shift from meat toward plant-based proteins like beans and nuts, and prioritize whole grains over refined ones."

## Key Recommendations for 2026

The new roadmap is designed to be applicable in all settings, from home kitchens to restaurant menus, with a specific emphasis on establishing heart-healthy habits during childhood. Key pillars of the update include:

- **Plant-Forward Proteins:** Increasing the intake of legumes, nuts, and seeds while reducing reliance on processed meats.
- **Healthy Fat Swaps:** Utilizing unsaturated fats, such as those found in avocados and olive oil, to replace saturated fats.
- **Minimal Processing:** Prioritizing whole foods and whole grains over refined alternatives.
- **Balance and Moderation:** Limiting added sugars and salt while balancing caloric intake with physical activity.

## Progress Over Perfection

The Association stresses that heart health is a long-term journey rather than a quick fix. "Focus on progress, not perfection," Dr. Khera adds. "Small swaps yield long-term benefits for a lifetime."

The full 2026 Dietary Guidance and specific recommendations for various age groups and lifestyle needs can be found at <http://Heart.org/HealthyDiet>.

### Official Organization & Program Links:

- American Heart Association Home: <https://www.heart.org/>
- AHA Healthy Diet Portal: <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/nutrition-basics/aha-diet-and-lifestyle-recommendations>

### Research & Clinical Data:

- AHA Scientific Journals (Circulation): <https://www.ahajournals.org/journal/circ>
- Understanding Processed Foods: <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/nutrition-basics/processed-foods>
- Monounsaturated & Healthy Fats: <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/fats/monounsaturated-fats>

### Educational Resources:

- Whole Grains vs. Refined Grains: <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/nutrition-basics/whole-grains-refined-grains-and-dietary-fiber>
- Physical Activity Recommendations: <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/fitness/fitness-basics/aha-recs-for-physical-activity-in-adults>
- Caloric Balance & Weight Management: <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/lose-weight/count-calories>

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