

AFib Diet Tips

What you eat can increase your risk of developing atrial fibrillation. High blood pressure, obesity and sleep apnea can all lead to [AFib](#) and are all significantly affected by lifestyle. A diet that is high in vegetables, fruits, lean protein, and whole grains and limits salt, sugar and saturated fat diet helps decrease your risk of high blood pressure and obesity.

Salt

It is recommended to limit salt intake to no more than 2300 mg/day. IF you have heart disease or high blood pressure The American Heart Association recommends that you eat less than 1500 mg/day of sodium. The average American eats 3600 mg/day. Increased salt intake can cause high blood pressure which can, in turn, lead to AFib. Some salty foods are obvious like chips and French fries. However, most processed foods are actually relatively high in salt which makes it easy to accidentally consume more salt than you intended to.

Common foods that are high in sodium:

- Pizza
- Deli meat
- Processed meat (i.e. hot dogs, bacon, sausage)
- Canned foods
- Dressings
- Marinades
- Surprisingly, even some rolls and breads are high in sodium.

This makes it easy for your salt intake to add up throughout the day. For example, let's say you want to have a sandwich for lunch. One slice of your average deli meat contains 300 mg of sodium. One slice of bread contains 150 mg sodium, a slice of cheese has 175 mg and ½ tablespoon mayonnaise has 90 mg. So if you eat a sandwich with 2 slices of bread, 3 slices of ham, 1 slice of cheese and ½ tablespoon mayonnaise you would have just had 1420 mg of sodium.

CALCULATE YOUR RISK

Preparing food from scratch allows you to control how much salt is in them. If you are buying prepared foods, look for ones which have no salt added or say reduced sodium. Reduced sodium means that it has at least 25% less sodium than the original product.

Sugar

Eating too much sugar increases your risk of obesity. Obesity increases risk of atrial fibrillation. Also increases the risk of high blood pressure and sleep apnea which both also independently increase your risk of sleep apnea. Most of us know we need to try to limit the amount of cookies, cake, and candy that we eat. However, there are many other foods which we may not necessarily think of as high in sugar which are actually quite high in their sugar content. These include pasta, flavored yogurts, packaged oatmeal, ketchup, barbecue sauce, some marinades and granola bars.

When shopping for these items, look for options which are lower in sugar or maybe even have a sugar substitute such as Stevia. Perhaps try satisfying your daily sweet tooth with fruit and save sugary treats for

special occasions.

Grapefruit

If you are on medications for atrial fibrillation, grapefruit can interfere with your body's ability to digest some of these medications which can increase the risk of side effects. Therefore, it is best to avoid grapefruit. If you want to eat grapefruit, check with your pharmacist or healthcare provider first to make sure it does not interact with your medications.

Caffeine

Numerous studies have looked at the effects of caffeine on atrial fibrillation and the results have been mixed. Some studies have shown that increased caffeine intake can increase risk of AFib. Others have shown that it does not have an effect. Regardless, if you are a coffee drinker, it is probably best to limit daily intake to no more than 2 to 3 cups of coffee per day.

Alcohol

Alcohol is irritating to the electrical conduction system of the heart and can worsen atrial fibrillation. Not drinking any alcohol is probably best. However, if you are going to drink alcohol we recommend limiting it to no more than 1 drink per day for women and 2 drinks per day for men.

Dark Leafy Greens

Vegetables, and dark leafy greens in particular, are full of many vitamins and micronutrients. They tend to be a part of any recommendations for a healthy diet. However, eating dark leafy greens or foods high in vitamin K can affect how well the anticoagulant warfarin (Coumadin) works to thin your blood and prevent stroke. If you are taking this medication, it is okay to eat vegetables and leafy greens. It is just important to work closely with your health care provider to make sure you are on the correct dose of warfarin.

Visit [The Scoop](#) next week for more helpful information about AFib.