SCARSTORIES · A LITTLE COMPANY ON THE WAY

Diet without misery

Eating for your heart doesn't have to mean beige food, hunger and guilt. The goal is a pattern you can actually keep — here's how to think about food after surgery, without making it a punishment.

Long-term heart health

> Educational content.

Heart-friendly eating after surgery is not a diet you go on and off — it's a direction you drift toward: more vegetables, less salt, fewer ultra-processed foods, and fats chosen with a little more care. The version of this that lasts is the one that fits your life, your kitchen and your appetite. Not the perfect version — the possible version.

What actually works

Consistency beats perfection. A plate you can keep for years beats a strict plan you follow for three weeks and abandon with guilt. The people who do best long-term are usually the ones who changed the fewest things — and changed them for good.

Instead of	Try
Crisps, fried snacks and biscuits within reach	Nuts, fruit, yogurt — something you actually like, not a punishment
Salt at the table, out of habit	Herbs, spices, lemon, garlic — taste first, salt second
Sugary drinks with meals	Water, sparkling water, or tea without sugar
The whole bag, packet or tin	A portion on a plate — the rest stays out of reach
Eating in front of a screen, fast	A table, slower, and paying attention

None of these are rules. They're directions. If you only ever manage one of them, it's still a win — and it's still more than you were doing before.

What to watch for, quietly

Salt is the one most people underestimate — it's everywhere, and the heart notices. Sugar hides in drinks and sauces, not just desserts. And ultra-processed foods tend to be high in both. You don't need to read a chemistry textbook at the supermarket; a quick look at the label for salt and sugar per serving is usually enough to sort the everyday from the occasional.

When food is emotional

Food is family, comfort, celebration — pretending otherwise sets you up to fail. One heavy meal is not a relapse; it's a meal. The pattern is the sum of hundreds of small choices, and a single choice doesn't sink it. Plan for the occasions — the wedding, the holiday, the family dinner — so you can enjoy them without a side of self-reproach.

> **Take it to your team**
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> Ask: is there a dietitian I can see through the clinic? Given my case — my blood results, my medicines — are there specific things to limit or prioritise? How should my eating change over time, if at all? Is there anything in my food that interacts with my medicines?

> **Call for help if**
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> You take medicines for diabetes or blood pressure and you change your eating pattern in a big way, and then get dizzy spells, sweating, or blood sugar readings that swing unusually. Contact your team — and don't adjust your medicines on your own.

A last word

Food after heart surgery is not a punishment with a deadline. It's a longer conversation with your own body, and the best answers are the ones you can live with for years. What to eat, how much, and what to change are decisions that belong to you and your team — a dietitian if you can get one, your doctor for the medical side, and you for the part that has to taste good enough to keep.

Questions to take to my team

- [ ] Can I see a dietitian?
- [ ] Given my results and medicines, which foods should I prioritize or limit?
- [ ] Should my eating plan change over time?
- [ ] Are there food or supplement interactions with my medicines?

For discussion and personal reference. Your care team’s individual instructions take priority. For an emergency, contact your local emergency service; do not wait for a community reply.