

# 5 Foods That Are Surprisingly Good for Your Heart



by Jessica Smith, [REDBOOK](#)

When you think of a heart healthy diet, you probably think of a low-fat, low-cholesterol, low-sodium (read: **BLAND**) foods. Not anymore! Here are five surprisingly heart-healthy foods to add to your diet:

## 1. Popcorn

According to one study done by the University of Scranton in Pennsylvania, popcorn was found to be the snack food that ranked highest in antioxidants and fiber. “Popcorn delivers polyphenols—antioxidants linked to improving heart health,” says Registered Dietician [Sharon Richter](#). “Gram for gram, popcorn boasts three times more polyphenols than kidney



beans or cranberries." So pop some up next time you are in the mood for a snack—just go easy on the butter and salt so you don't negate all of your popcorn's heart healthy benefits.)

## 2. Potatoes

Potatoes developed a bad reputation during the low-carb craze, but they are not only [great for](#) weight loss, but also heart health. "A Russet potato contains more potassium than a banana, which helps prevent high blood pressure, is a great source of soluble fiber which helps maintain bowel and heart health, and has no fat or cholesterol. In fact, one baked, medium Russet has only 135 calories and around a fifth of your recommended daily intake of protein and fiber," says [Richter](#).

## 3. Pistachios

According to the FDA, studies show eating one and a half ounces of nuts a day, along with a healthy diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may reduce your risk of heart disease. "Pistachios are nutrient-dense and packed with protein, fiber, antioxidants and better cardiovascular benefits than any other nut," says Registered Dietician [Sharon Ritcher](#). (If you need to watch your sodium intake, grab the unsalted kind.)

## 4. Coconut Oil

"Coconut oil has traditionally suffered a bad rap due to its high levels of saturated fat content, but is in fact heart healthy", says certified Health and Nutrition counselor [Marissa Vicario](#). Studies have shown that coconut oil raises HDL (good cholesterol), without raising LDL (bad cholesterol). "There's a significant property of coconut oil that distinguishes it from other sources of saturated fat and contributes to the health benefits of coconut oil. Coconut oil is comprised of medium-chain fatty acids (MCFAs), also called medium-chain triglycerides. Research has demonstrated that medium-chain fats in coconut oil actually protect against heart disease," says Registered Dietician [Sharon Ritcher](#). And you don't have to eat coconut to reap its heart healthy benefits. Coconut oil is great for cooking, says Vicario, and is "always on-hand in my kitchen and a top choice for me in cooking and baking."

## 5. Coffee

While it may not technically be a “food”, it is the number one source of antioxidants in Americans’ daily diet, according to a study done by researchers at the University of Scranton in Pennsylvania. “Who knew? Most people shy away from coffee, convinced that it is bad for one’s health. This couldn’t be further from the truth! Coffee antioxidants (polyphenols) help the body fight off heart disease by scavenging up dangerous free-radicals,” says [Dr. Janet Brill](#), author of *Prevent a Second Heart Attack: 8 Foods, 8 Weeks to Reverse Heart Disease*. “The cardio protective effect of coffee polyphenols may be due to their direct antioxidant properties but also to their ability to impart positive changes in the physiology of the inner arterial walls,” says Dr. Brill. Prefer decaf? Brew it up! You can still benefit from decaf coffee’s antioxidants, says Dr. Brill.