



# Legacy of Heart

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American  
Heart  
Association.

# Shake It or Skip It? Here's Expert Advice on Salt

A sprinkle of sea salt, a smidgeon of table salt, a kiss of kosher salt: Seasoning with salt is often seen as vital to cooking. Salt also has been used to preserve food and even used as currency. But it's the excess salt consumption that experts say poses a gigantic public health problem. Table salt is made up of two minerals: sodium and chloride. Small amounts of sodium help the body control its fluids and play a role in nerve and muscle function. However, too much sodium in your diet can lead to high blood pressure, a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease.



"So, if we can reduce our blood pressure, that's going to save so many lives," said Dr. Tali Elfassy, a research assistant professor of epidemiology at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. Reducing "sodium is just one tool" for fighting high blood pressure, she noted.

Most adults should limit their daily sodium intake to a maximum of 2,300 milligrams, according to [federal dietary guidelines](#). The [ideal limit](#) for most adults, especially those with high blood pressure, is 1,500 mg per day, the American Heart Association says. Using different types of salt – table salt, kosher salt or sea salt – doesn't change those recommended limits. But the sodium amounts may differ based on the coarseness of the salt. "The coarser the salt and the bigger the crystals, the less actual amount fits on the spoon, and therefore the sodium level will be lower comparatively," said Michelle Routhenstein, a registered dietitian nutritionist who specializes in heart health at her private practice in New York.

Reducing salt intake to meet the recommended limits can seem daunting. But workarounds exist to help. One big hurdle to overcome is the myth that reducing sodium intake means cooking flavorless food. Routhenstein said she encourages keeping the recommendations in perspective. "I have seen in my clients that people are looking for zero milligrams of sodium" when they read nutrition labels, she said. "You don't need a no-salt diet."

"Think of the sodium recommendations as a daily salt budget. People often think 150 mg of sodium in a food item is too high," Routhenstein said. "However, if you have high blood pressure and want to stay under the recommended 1,500 mg, and you have three meals and two snacks, that can be divided as 350 milligrams per meal and 200 milligrams per snack," she said. Routhenstein and Elfassy said putting down the saltshaker likely won't help with some of the biggest sources of sodium: packaged items and prepared foods, including those purchased from restaurants and fast-food chains. "There are some menu items that have 2,000 to 7,000 milligrams of sodium," Routhenstein said.

When people can cut back on salt, [blood pressure can respond](#) very quickly, Elfassy and Routhenstein said. Indeed, [research shows](#) blood pressure can be lowered within a week of making those changes.

[Read More Here](#)

# Lessons in Healthy Eating From a School Nutrition Manager

As soon as the students get off the bus at Morrow Middle School each morning, the first thing they see is Barbara O'Connor and her breakfast cart. For 10 years at the school south of Atlanta, the 66-year-old nutrition manager has made sure every student who walks through the doors has the chance to start their day with a healthy breakfast.

Meals offered in public schools are gradually being brought in line with the federal Dietary Guidelines for Americans, limiting added sugars and allowing for protein-rich breakfast options such as yogurt, tofu, nuts and seeds as an alternative to sugary breakfast foods.

O'Connor, winner of the No Kid Hungry School Breakfast Hero award in 2019, talked about her school nutrition work with American Heart Association News as part of "[The Experts Say](#)," a series in which specialists explain how they apply what they've learned to their own lives. The following interview has been edited.

## How do you encourage the students to eat healthier foods?

We put up posters about the five food groups (fruits, vegetables, grains, protein foods and dairy) and signs that tell them how many grains, fruits and vegetables they should have. (The American Heart Association [considers](#) some fats and oils a sixth food group.) We make sure healthy choices are available at breakfast and lunch. Our pizzas are whole grain. We offer a chef's salad three times a week. And we always have plenty of fruit.

We can suggest healthy choices, but we're not allowed to tell them what to pick up.

## How do you incorporate healthy eating into your own meal choices?

My husband, John, has high cholesterol and we both have Type 2 diabetes, so we eat a whole lot more vegetables than we used to. We both love broccoli. We probably eat it three times a week. I steam it. One of John's favorite foods is beets. He loves those.

We don't fry anymore. Everything's baked. We eat fish and chicken. We try to stay away from red meat. I make things like chicken fajitas with bell peppers. John likes cabbage on his. And we're careful about portion control. If my husband and I go to a restaurant, anything we get we're taking half of it home.

## What else do you do to stay healthy?

We have a pool, so we get out there in the summer and swim. The kids don't come over as much as they used to, but John and I swim laps. We take a lot more walks. We have walking trails throughout the city, and we go out and walk the dog. I've been known to go out there and do an hour-and-a-half walk with the dog. During the school year, it can be difficult, but most of the time I'm home by 3:15 or 3:30. I'll just grab the dog and go for a walk. That's my decompression time.



Barbara O'Connor (right) with her husband, John, and daughter Christine after O'Connor won an award in 2019 for her nutrition efforts at Morrow Middle School in Georgia.

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# What is a Charitable Gift Annuity?



You may have heard of a charitable gift annuity, but what is it? A charitable gift annuity (CGA) is a special gift opportunity where you receive dependable, fixed income payments for each year of your life in exchange for your lifesaving gift.

There are many ways to fund a charitable gift annuity, including from your IRA if you meet the age requirements. Depending on how you fund your gift, you can also qualify for a variety of tax benefits.

## How It Works

- 1. Donate.** Transfer cash, securities, or other assets such as funds from an individual retirement account (IRA).
- 2. Receive fixed income payments.** You'll receive fixed payments at a guaranteed rate for each year of your life - and the lifetime of a loved one, if you so choose.
- 3. Make a significant impact.** After your lifetime, the remaining amount of your gift becomes part of your legacy with the American Heart Association in support of our lifesaving mission.



Payment rates for CGAs are the best they've been in 16 years, meaning more income for you! It's a great time to consider this popular gift arrangement that provides you with stable, fixed income regardless of the economy.

There's more great news if you are 70 1/2 years or older! You can now make a one-time gift of up to \$53,000 from your IRA to fund a gift that pays you income. This means you can make an even greater impact, and you may receive additional tax benefits.

[Learn More About the Gift That Pays You Back](#)



# Too Much of a Food Thing: A Century of Change in How We Eat

Think about the last meal you ate. Whether it was a reheated plate of takeout food, a cornucopia of fresh fruit or something in between, it probably would have been unfathomable to most people a century ago. Over the past 100 years, the way Americans buy, cook and think of food has changed dramatically, driven by developments in how it is manufactured, marketed, purchased and eaten. Food historians say it's been an era of abundance. And that has had consequences.

"The increasing industrialization of the food supply has not been good for health," said Dr. Marion Nestle, professor emerita of nutrition, food studies and public health at New York University.

A detailed accounting of everything that reshaped Americans' health and diet over the past century could fill a library. But Nestle, a molecular biologist and award-winning author who has written a small library's worth of books on food-related topics, sums it up this way: "People used to eat at home and cook at home. Now, they eat out or eat foods that have already been prepared."

Prepared or even processed food isn't necessarily unhealthy – think of pasteurized milk or sliced carrots. But many highly processed foods contain unhealthy amounts of salt, fat and calories, and [research](#) has associated increased consumption of ultra-processed foods with a higher risk of heart conditions and numerous other health problems. A 2021 American Heart Association [scientific statement](#) recommends that people choose minimally processed foods instead of ultra-processed ones.



Nestle's simplified definition of ultra-processed food is "food that can't be made at home" because of the processes and additives involved.

Such foods were virtually unknown a century ago. But in 1924, the process that enabled the frozen food industry was invented. And while frozen fruits and vegetables can be a boon to health, frozen food was not the only change that would begin to reshape the U.S. diet, said Dr. Ken Albala, a food historian at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. Albala, author of 27 books on food and editor of many more, said that in the 1920s, most of what people ate would have been fresh,





unprocessed and locally grown. But change was coming. A few years earlier, in 1916, the first modern supermarket had opened in Memphis, Tennessee.

Before supermarkets, Albala said, shoppers would have had a personal connection with the grocer at a local market, who would have fetched the items customers asked for based on what the grocer had chosen to stock. The supermarket let people select their own items, which put a premium on branding as manufacturers sought to make their products stand out.

That led to "incredible diversity, because now there's 18 different kinds of ketchup and there's 20 brands of frozen this or that," Albala said.

But supermarkets also began distancing people from the source of what they were eating, he said. Before that era, a family might have gotten produce from a stand, which would have sold local harvests in season. The new system favored mass-grown varieties that were bred for color, durability or other factors.

The way food was made changed, too. Factory-made sliced bread surpassed home bakers in the 1930s, a decade that also saw the arrival of processed legends such as boxed macaroni with powdered cheese (with sodium phosphate as an emulsifier) and canned pork shoulder (with salt, sugar and sodium nitrate as a preservative). But it was World War II that brought radical changes as products and technologies developed to feed soldiers. As a result, canned meals made their way into homes.



"You could say the C ration is the grandfather of the TV dinner," Albala said, referring to the frozen, oven-ready meals that became popular in the early 1950s.

Nestle said that after the war, processed products started appearing in packages that resembled the original foods that they came from less and less, with an "enormous" emphasis on convenience.

"There was a concerted effort to make cooking look like drudgery and to take away the idea that cooking was something that was fun and pleasant that you wanted to spend time on," she said.

Attitudes about eating out changed. In the 19th century, usually only the wealthiest families would have eaten for pleasure at restaurants. Chain restaurants started popping up in the 1920s, and the 1950s brought widespread fast food – meals that emphasized speed far above nutrition. Money spent on meals eaten away from home eclipsed at-home eating in 2010, according to the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#). All that convenience may seem like a blessing for the people, traditionally women, who had to prepare and serve all those meals. A homemaker could have spent several hours a day cooking in the 1920s. As of 2022, according to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), the average American spent an estimated 39 minutes a day on food preparation and cleanup. Technology and transportation improvements mean someone in Kansas can pick up pineapples from the tropics and farmed salmon from the Atlantic on the same mid-winter grocery trip.



And it wouldn't eat up as much of their money as food did a century ago: In 2022, families spent about 11% of their disposable income on food, [federal data](#) shows. In 1919, they spent more than three times that percentage, according to [historical data](#). And food is more abundant than ever. One analysis, published in [Frontiers in Nutrition](#) in 2022, estimated that available calories grew 18% from 1909 through the following century."

That's the good news. The bad news is that Americans are eating those calories. Albala said the past century is the first time "when a sizable percentage of the population can actually overeat. That's never been the case in history before."

It shows in our waistlines: More than 70% of U.S. adults are overweight, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). And while eating habits that emphasize foods like fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and plant-based protein or lean, unprocessed meats are recommended for heart health, research suggests that more than half of what Americans eat on average is ultra-processed.



Nestle said the abundance of food in the U.S. means corporations have to work harder than ever to sell it. So their efforts are frequently focused on making their products "irresistibly delicious" and in larger portions. She said that economics dictate that manufacturers emphasize not wellness, but profits. "Food companies are not social service or public health agencies."

For people trying to stay healthy, fighting all that history can be an uphill battle. "I don't have a crystal ball," Nestle said. "But I see the trends going in the same direction unless there's a big change."

Understanding how we got here can help. But that requires education, Nestle said. And that favors wealthier people, who can afford healthier dining options. People without a lot of money "eat what they can get," she said, and in low-income areas, healthier food often is not easily accessible. For people interested in bucking historical trends, Albala suggests a thoughtful approach. "Get as much pleasure as you can out of preparing it and cooking and serving it and sharing it and eating it. And that way, I think you will necessarily be more balanced."

While raising his children, Albala emphasized home-cooked meals that were eaten as a family. "That's hard sometimes," he said. But "there's a value in sharing and preparing foods. It's much more than just feeding."

But even shopping for basic foods can be a reminder of how much things have changed, he said. A modern shopper picking up an apple might wonder who developed it and whether it was shipped from halfway across the country or from some other country.

"Those are questions that would have perplexed our ancestors a century ago," Albala said.

[Read More Here](#)

# How a Young Mother Discovered She Needed a Heart Transplant

Tiara Johnson's second pregnancy went smoothly – until the last month.

"My fingers were so puffy, I couldn't wear my wedding ring," she said.

The problem stemmed from her blood pressure. And the rising blood pressure stemmed from preeclampsia, a complication of pregnancy that usually manifests in the later months.



Heart transplant recipient Tiara Johnson.

Tiara, who lives in Fraser, Michigan, was given medication to control her blood pressure. It didn't work, so a few days later, she was sent to the hospital to have labor induced. After delivering her second daughter, Azuri, Tiara's blood pressure remained elevated. When she went home a few days later, she couldn't get comfortable.

"I just didn't feel right," Tiara said. "Sitting down or lying down, nothing made it better."

She returned to the hospital. She was treated for fluid retention and sent home again. She continued to feel tired but attributed it to recovery from childbirth and life with a newborn.

Two months later, Tiara passed out in the parking lot at work. Taken by ambulance to a different hospital, she received a different diagnosis: Peripartum cardiomyopathy, an uncommon form of heart failure that happens during the last month of pregnancy or within the first five months after giving birth. A physician said her heart was working at 10% of its normal function.

"I was confused and distraught," she said. "When you think of heart failure, you don't think of someone who is 26."

Over the next three and a half years, Tiara was constantly in and out of the hospital as doctors worked to ease the strain on her heart. Then, in August 2018, doctors wanted to implant a left ventricular assist device, a machine that essentially does the work for the left side of the heart. An LVAD is often used before a patient goes on the heart transplant waiting list. However, there was another obstacle. Tiara needed to lose weight to become eligible for the list.

Working with a nutritionist, she learned to cut out fried and fast foods. She ate more meals at home, many of those including more vegetables than before. She also dabbled in intermittent fasting. Meanwhile, she began the process of getting an LVAD. She received it in March 2019 and continued her weight loss journey. By April 2021, she'd lost 110 pounds. She'd reached the acceptable range to receive a heart transplant, so the process of getting on the list began.



She received a spot on Oct. 14. Two weeks later, she was hospitalized because of a severe leak of her aortic valve. Doctors feared she would soon need open-heart surgery. Instead, on Nov. 5, she was moved closer to the top of the transplant list. She also was sent home.

The next day, Tiara was waiting in the car while her husband, Gvon, went into a store to get cold medicine for their older daughter when her phone rang. Caller ID showed it was the University of Michigan hospital in Ann Arbor. Within an hour she was on her way to the hospital.

"I couldn't believe it was happening," she said. "This is what I had worked hard for all this time and now I was going to get a new heart. Even when I got to the hospital, it was hard to process."



The Johnson family, clockwise from top left: Husband Gvon, daughters Azuri and Aranee, and Tiara.

Several days after the transplant, Tiara was walking laps around the unit. She even tidied her hospital room.

"Once I got up, it was like, 'It's on. I'm not going to be lying in this bed being miserable,'" she said.

Next came learning to get used to having a heart that worked properly.

"When I first started walking, I thought, 'Tiara, you better slow down or your heart is going to race.' But the monitor was normal. I was just normal," she said.

Tiara went home on Thanksgiving. But the celebration fizzled quickly. Azuri, now 6 and visiting Tiara's godmother, had a high fever and was struggling to breathe. She tested positive for COVID-19 and was admitted to the hospital with pneumonia. Azuri was hospitalized for five days, then quarantined in her room at home another two and a half weeks as a precaution because of Tiara's compromised immune system. Tiara then got the flu, sending her to bed for two weeks. Once healthy, she returned to cardiac rehab.

Tiara still finds herself automatically reaching for her LVAD to find it isn't there. "I have to remind myself I'm free, I don't need that anymore."

"Just to see her smile is everything," Gvon said.

Now 32, Tiara continues to focus on her recovery and her future. She's taking classes to finish her associate degree in social work this spring before pursuing a bachelor's degree.

"I feel amazing now," she said. "I know I can do it."

# How Siblings Became Champions of Heart Health and Education

In Texas, siblings Ed Herider and Lynda Truitt have devoted their lives to promoting heart health and education. Their commitment began with a strong family history of heart disease. Ed, who worked in the family poultry business, and Lynda, a wife and mother, felt compelled to stay healthy to combat their family's genetic heart issues. The heart problems of their father and grandfather highlighted the importance of preventative measures.

Lynda was also motivated to make a difference by her late husband Jake, a dedicated football coach who valued preparedness above all. His desire to be better prepared for emergencies inspired Lynda. After his passing, his passion became her own personal mission, ensuring his lasting impact. By promoting heart health and education, she honors his legacy and continues the work he was passionate about.

Ed and Lynda established the E.L. (Roy) & Thelma Herider Foundation in honor of their parents to support their community and give back. They have promoted CPR in Schools, helping students learn lifesaving skills in just one class period. A fulfilling moment for them was providing CPR manikins to local high schools, including Lynda's grandkids' school. The full-circle moment showcased the direct impact of their generosity.

Ed stresses the importance of proactive health measures, stating, "Most people don't pay any attention to their health until they are older and they run into problems. By then, it is more difficult to reverse what has happened." Ed's wish is for people to take responsibility for their health before they experience a life-changing health event. "Our parents would be pleased that this is what we've been doing," Lynda reflects, "making a strong impact for the health of the community and future generations."



*Lynda Truitt and Ed Herider*

Their involvement with the AHA reflects their commitment to life and education. Ed says, "Our heart is a critical organ and deserves our attention, and the AHA helps people focus on their heart health rather than ignore it. Supporting this cause is incredibly important because it serves many people. Just hearing about heart health can inspire others to take care of themselves and avoid heart-related events."



American Heart Association,

Professional Advisor Network

# ASK AN ADVISOR

## Having the Heart to Plan Ahead

Written by Jaye A. Straus



Many people think about their plan for the future in terms of how they want their assets to be distributed to their loved ones and the charities they support. However, as we navigate through life, unexpected health challenges can arise, making it crucial to have clear, legally-binding instructions in place. Creating a comprehensive estate plan encompasses not only the distribution of your assets, but also directives for medical care, which can alleviate stress for your loved ones and ensure that your preferences are honored. By planning ahead, you can take control of your future, providing peace of mind for you and your loved ones.

Your will serves as the foundation of your estate plan; however, an effective estate plan encompasses a comprehensive series of legal documents that outline how you wish for your affairs to be managed both during and after your lifetime. This includes your future healthcare. A solid plan includes preparing for possible health incapacities by outlining your wishes for end-of-life care, organ donation, and naming who you want to step in to make medical decisions on your behalf if you become unable to do so yourself. This is an essential aspect of estate planning that is often overlooked.

As an estate planner, I hear stories far too frequently about individuals who lose capacity before they were able to explicitly communicate if they want to stay in their own homes while receiving treatment, list out which treatments they are willing or unwilling to receive, decide if they want to give away body parts, or if they want to be buried or cremated after their passing. These instructions are overlooked – especially when many individuals believe that executing a will alone is sufficient estate planning. The reality is that while a will may be effective to bequeath inheritance, it does not help one avoid the living probate process; living probate consists of court proceedings where a judge involuntarily places you into a guardianship and appoints someone to make medical and financial decisions for you because you failed to list who you wanted to act on your behalf while you still had the capacity to do so.

The silver lining is that making your healthcare planning desires known is simple: one needs to look no further than to state-compliant Advance Healthcare Directives (also referred to as a Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare), Living Will forms, Advance Burial/Cremation Directives, and the like to avoid a guardianship over the person. Having these directives in place will ensure that your medical care is carried out according to your wishes and does not fall within the control of a judge. Furthermore, getting your healthcare plan in place is also a good time to explore forming a will or trust if you haven't already, and to consider how you can create a legacy through the charitable organizations that mean the most to you as a part of your estate planning.

Many of us have either heard a tragic story or personally experienced a time when someone we know and care about has gone through a medical event without having a written plan and directive in place—before an agent could be named, treatment wishes could be listed, or guidance on life-sustaining treatment and body part donation noted. The solution for avoiding these situations? Plan ahead. Just as you wouldn't wait to purchase insurance until after an accident, you also wouldn't wait to plan for your healthcare treatment only after you have lost capacity or the physical ability to do so.



## Your Next Steps

Taking the steps now to plan ahead for future healthcare is vital for everyone, regardless of age, marital status, or if you have children. Using the services of an estate planning attorney is an important first step to ensure that your wishes are translated appropriately. Beginning with your plans for future medical care can be the first step in shaping a comprehensive estate plan that secures your future for you and those you love.

## About the Author



Jaye A. Straus is an estate planning attorney based in Las Vegas, Nevada. She received a B.S.B.A. from the University of Miami, J.D. degree from the University of Miami, and an LL.M. in Estate Planning from the University of Miami. Jaye zealously guides her clients through the estate planning process and believes that the healthcare components of estate planning are just as important as deciding where one's assets pass at the end of the day.

**Jaye A. Straus, Esq., LL.M.**

# National Estate Planning Awareness Week

October 21 - 27, 2024

Mark your calendar for National Estate Planning Awareness Week (NEPAW), an important reminder that everyone - no matter your age or your assets - should have a plan to secure your future. A solid estate plan allows you to protect your assets, provide for your loved ones, determine your future healthcare, and much more.

NEPAW is also the perfect time to think about leaving a lasting legacy. Estate planning isn't just about managing assets; it's an opportunity to make a meaningful impact for future generations. By including the AHA in your plans, you can support heart health for years to come. We can help you create your plan and define your legacy with some helpful tips and a variety of complimentary resources.

## Navigating Your Estate Plan

Ask the Experts:

### Navigating Your Estate Plan

Tuesday, October 22, 2024

11:00am PT / 12:00pm MT / 1:00pm CT / 2:00pm ET

Informational Zoom Webinar

Discover how to secure your future and protect your loved ones by attending our upcoming live webinar. This free, interactive session will explore the basic principles of estate planning to help you understand how to secure your future and create a lasting impact.

During this special event, you'll have the opportunity to ask your questions and receive expert advice directly from seasoned professionals. Whether you're new to estate planning or looking to refine your strategy, this webinar will provide valuable insights and practical tips.

Don't miss this chance to learn more about how thoughtful planning can benefit both your future and the causes you care about. Register now to reserve your spot!

When you register, we'll send two free resources to help you plan. The **Importance of Proper Planning** brochure includes a handy checklist of key items to keep in mind when considering your personal plan.

The **Beneficiary Designations** brochure explains one of the easiest ways to use your life insurance policy, donor advised fund, retirement account, or other financial account to create a legacy.

Additionally, the **Legacy of the Heart: Your Will and Estate Planning Workbook** is a resource available upon request to help understand the components of the estate planning process from start to finish. It includes 15 worksheets to help you organize your intentions and your assets. You can request a free guide by visiting [heart.org/wpk](http://heart.org/wpk).



**REGISTER AND RECEIVE  
YOUR GUIDES**

Ready to get started with your plans today? The American Heart Association offers a free online service through FreeWill to make your plan quick and straightforward.

**CREATE YOUR  
FREE WILL**

# Texas Caviar

This recipe is a classic and traditional Southern-American black-eyed pea salad that's full of flavor and fresh vegetables. With tailgates and viewing parties right around the corner, try this easy-to-make, healthy, and satisfying snack. Texas caviar is a fresh, colorful dip packed with veggies and flavor—perfect for sharing with friends and family!

**Servings: 8**

**Fiber: 5g per serving**

**Calories: 150 per serving**

**Protein: 6g per serving**



## Ingredients:

- 30 ounces canned, reduced-sodium black-eyed peas (drained, rinsed)
- 2 green onions ((green part only), thinly sliced)
- 1 ear of corn (cut off cob) OR 1 cup fresh, frozen corn (thawed)
- 1 small bell pepper, yellow or red, seeded, stems discarded, diced
- 1/2 cup fresh cilantro (chopped)
- 3 fresh jalapeño peppers (seeded, diced)
- 2 cups tomatoes (diced) OR 14.5 oz. canned, no-salt-added, diced tomatoes
- 3 clove fresh garlic (minced) OR 3 teaspoons jarred, minced garlic
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1/2 teaspoon lime zest
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- fresh, ground black pepper (to taste)

1. In a medium bowl, combine the black-eyed peas, green onions, corn, bell pepper, cilantro, jalapenos, tomatoes, and garlic.
2. In a separate bowl whisk together the olive oil, lime juice, zest, and cumin. Pour over vegetables, add salt and pepper and toss together until vegetables are coated completely oil blend. Best if chilled for 2-3 hours.
3. Serve as a side dish or with whole grain pita chips.

**Heart-Healthy Recipes Available Anytime!**

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