

Happy February!

As we celebrate Heart Health Month this February, it's important to recognize that while lifestyle factors like diet, exercise, and stress management are key to maintaining a healthy heart, our genetics also play a significant role.

Family history can influence our risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, and other cardiovascular conditions. Understanding these genetic factors, along with making heart-healthy lifestyle choices, can empower us to take proactive steps toward better heart health.

Did you know that our dietary choices can influence how your genes behave? While lifestyle choices play a significant role in heart health, understanding your genetic risks can help guide prevention strategies, including dietary manipulations to reduce overall risk. This month's newsletter will take a closer look at genes & cardiovascular risk.

Let's use this Heart Month as motivation to prioritize our cardiovascular health through genetic testing, mindful choices and

sustainable habits.

Wishing you a heart-healthy February!



Filomena Vernace Inserra,
Your Registered Dietitian

Nutrition & Genetics



NUTRIGENOMIX ™
EAT ACCORDING TO YOUR GENES

It is no surprise to read that lifestyle choices play a major role in shaping your heart health. But your genetics also play a significant role in the development of heart disease. When you combine genetics with diet and lifestyle, now we are talking next-level nutrition.

Nutrigenomix is a biotechnology company founded right here in Toronto by global leaders in nutrigenomics research. This genetic test allows Dietitians like myself counsel individuals according to their DNA, and tailor dietary advice accordingly. I am proud to say that I have partnered with Nutrigenomix more than 10 years ago and have been guiding clients ever since to further fine tune their

health risks with this simple saliva test. Which genes are currently being used to fine tune dietary advice for heart health?

Caffeine

The CYP1A2 gene produces an enzyme called cytochrome P450 1A2 (CYP1A2), which is the main enzyme responsible for breaking down caffeine in the body. Variations in the CYP1A2 gene affect the rate at which caffeine is broken down, which determines the impact of caffeine on heart health. Individuals who possess the GA or AA variant of CYP1A2 break down caffeine more slowly and are at greater risk of high blood pressure and heart attack when caffeine intake is high if consuming more than 200 mg of caffeine daily, which is approximately 2 small cups of coffee.

Sodium

Sodium regulates blood pressure and blood volume. As a population, we consume too much sodium. The problem with too much dietary sodium is high blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease. But some people do not experience an increase in blood pressure in response to high dietary sodium intake as others. Research shows that the effect of sodium intake on blood pressure is influenced by variations in a gene called ACE.

The ACE gene directs the body to produce the angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE), which is known to influence the response of blood pressure to sodium intake. Studies have shown that a person's blood pressure response to high sodium intake is dependent on which variant of the ACE gene they possess. Those who have the GA or AA variant of the ACE gene are at a greater risk of experiencing high blood pressure when higher amounts of sodium are consumed than those possessing the GG variant of the gene. Keeping to 1500mg sodium per day is recommended for individuals who carry the variant.

Omega 6, Omega 3 & HDL Cholesterol

There are 2 main types of fats - the "healthier" unsaturated fats and "less healthy" saturated fats. With unsaturated fats, there are further 2 types - monounsaturated and polyunsaturated. Higher consumption of polyunsaturated fats is associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease. There are 2 main types of polyunsaturated fats - omega-6 fat, such as linoleic acid (LA), and omega-3 fat, such as alpha-linolenic acid (ALA). Since our bodies cannot make omega-6 LA and omega-3 ALA, these essential fats must be obtained from our diets. However, consuming too much omega-6 LA and too little omega-3 ALA may have adverse health effects. Studies have shown that a gene involved in the metabolism of these polyunsaturated fats can adversely impact levels of HDL cholesterol ("good cholesterol") when dietary omega-6 LA intake is high, or when the ratio of omega-6 LA to

omega-3 ALA is too high. Clients with this gene variant will be guided towards increasing their intake of omega-3s.

To learn more about Nutrigenomix, click [HERE](#)

To book an appointment with our Dietitian to have your genetic test ordered, click [HERE](#)

The Mediterranean Dietary Pattern

The **Mediterranean diet** is widely considered one of the best dietary patterns for heart disease prevention due to its combination of heart-healthy foods and its potential to improve risk factors like blood cholesterol, blood pressure, and inflammation.

The **Mediterranean diet**, inspired by the eating patterns of countries around the Mediterranean Sea (e.g., Spain, Italy, Southern Greece), is characterized by a substantial inclusion of:

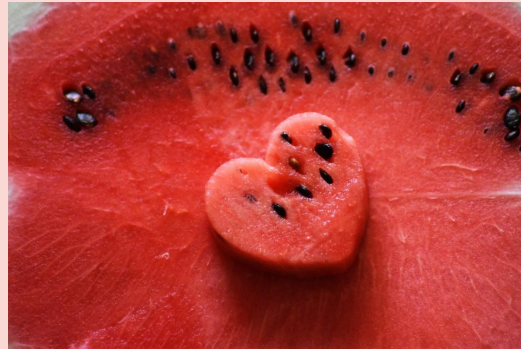
- whole grains
- leafy green vegetables
- fruits
- legumes
- unsalted nuts
- herbs
- spices
- extra virgin olive oil (EVOO)
- moderate consumption of lean proteins like fish and poultry
- measured intake of alcohol
- restricts the consumption of red meat and sweets.

In essence, the **Mediterranean diet** inherently limits or excludes



several components found in the typical American diet that contribute to cardiovascular disease (CVD) - such as saturated fats, highly processed refined grains and sugars, and excessive red meat.

The **Mediterranean diet** is considered beneficial because it includes a mix of healthy foods rather than just taking specific nutrients. It naturally gives antioxidants, lowers inflammation in blood vessels, affects certain genes linked to artery disease, changes the balance of gut bacteria, and improves cholesterol levels by lowering "bad" LDL cholesterol and increasing "good" HDL cholesterol.



Eating for a Healthy Heart Quick Tips

Meal Preparation:

- Opt for fresh, whole foods when preparing meals at home.
- Choose whole grains like oatmeal, quinoa, and brown rice for at least half of your grain servings.

Vegetables and Fruits:

- Fill half your plate with a variety of brightly coloured vegetables and fruits.
- Prioritize orange and dark green vegetables such as sweet potatoes and kale.
- Choose whole fruits over juices, and try unsweetened frozen or canned fruit in winter.

Hydration:

- Avoid sugary beverages like pop, sports drinks, and fruit juices.

Mindful Cooking:

- Use less sugar, salt, and fat when preparing meals.
- Replace salt with herbs and spices for flavour.
- Rinse canned vegetables and fruits to reduce added sugar or salt.

High-Fibre Choices:

- Increase fibre intake with vegetables, fruits with peels, and whole grains.
- Add bran, high-fibre cereal, or flaxseed to boost fibre content.

Limit Processed Foods:

- Minimize intake of highly processed foods.
- Be cautious of items like hot dogs, deli meats, cakes, candies, and fast food.
- Reduce consumption of refined foods such as white rice, bread, and pasta.

Remember, small changes in your eating habits can lead to significant improvements in heart health!



Heart Healthy Recipes

Perfect recipes to try for Valentine's day weekend!

Garden Veggie Buddha Bowl with Lentils

[Click here for the full recipe](#)



Apricot Coconut Bars

[Click here for the full recipe](#)



Roasted Beet, Walnut & Arugula Salad

[Click here](#) for the full recipe



Chocolate Walnut Brownies

[Click here](#) for the full recipe



Looking for **Valentine's Day** gift ideas with a nutritious twist?

Read **THIS** for Dietitian-inspired V-Day gifts.



Your Kitchen Compass

Are you looking to spice things up in your kitchen? Feeling the February blahs and unmotivated to cook? Want recipes delivered to your inbox each week? Want 5 new recipes each week? Want to be part of a group of like-minded individuals who want tips on meal planning and recipes? Then, our Nourish program is for you!

Nourish is for you if....



The Goals of the Program...

- Get organized in the kitchen and prioritize healthy home-cooked meals
- Become confident when shopping for healthier foods at the grocery store
- Simplify meal planning and grocery shopping
- Involve family members in meal planning and meal preparation
- Take the confusion out of eating healthy
- Access new healthy recipes each week
- Help you feel less overwhelmed in the kitchen
- Feel supported knowing you are not alone

To find out more, contact us **TODAY!**

Want to book an appointment with one of our
Registered Dietitians or
Social Workers?

Click [HERE](#)



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