



The Dudley Group
NHS Foundation Trust

Healthy eating for a healthy heart and circulation

Nutrition and Dietetics

Patient Information Leaflet

A healthy heart

Making sure we keep our heart healthy can help us lead a long and active life.

We can prevent problems in lots of ways, but the following changes can particularly make a difference and help to decrease the risk of diseases such as heart disease or a stroke:

- Stopping smoking
- Making healthier food choices
- Increasing how much physical activity we do
- Trying to achieve and maintain a healthy weight

This booklet will look at how having a healthy diet can help you to have a healthy heart. It includes information on the importance of the following:

- Regular meals
- Choosing healthier fats
- Eating more fruit and vegetables
- Eating more fibre
- Eating oily fish
- Using less sugar
- Using less salt
- Watching your alcohol intake
- Reading food labels
- Maintaining a healthy weight

Regular meals

To achieve and maintain a healthy weight and lifestyle, we should aim to have a healthy balanced diet.

This includes regular balanced meals and healthy snacks during the day, whilst limiting foods high in fat, sugar and salt.

The Eatwell guide demonstrates how we can do this:



Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

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Aim to:

- Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day
- Include some starchy carbohydrates such as bread, potatoes, pasta, rice and cereals. Try to choose wholegrain varieties where possible
- Have two portions a day of lean meat (for example, chicken), fish or meat alternatives such as Quorn or lentils and pulses
- Have low fat milk and dairy products
- Limit foods high in fat and sugar such as cakes and chocolate
- Limit snacks to 100kcal each and two a day maximum

Choose healthier fats

Triglycerides are fatty substances found in your blood. High levels of these can increase your risk of heart disease.

Cholesterol is a fatty substance carried in your blood by proteins (known together as lipoproteins) and the body needs these to function normally.

There are two main types of cholesterol for heart health:

- LDL (low density lipoprotein) – also known as the bad cholesterol because it can build up in the artery walls leading to disease of the arteries.
- HDL (high density lipoprotein) – also known as the good cholesterol because it carries excess cholesterol away from the blood back to the liver where it is broken down.

An important step in reducing bad cholesterol and triglycerides is to eat a healthy balanced diet including the right types of fats.

Fats to avoid:

Saturated fats are mainly found in foods such as meat and meat products, butter, ghee, cheese, cream, cakes, biscuits and pastries. A diet high in saturated fat can raise your bad cholesterol, increasing your risk of heart disease and strokes.

Trans fats are found in hydrogenated oils, as well as some cakes, biscuits, pastries and deep fried foods. This type of fat can raise your bad cholesterol and reduce your good cholesterol.

Healthier choices:

Polyunsaturated fats are found in foods such as oily fish (for example, mackerel, tuna, salmon), and sunflower, safflower, soya and corn oils or margarines. These fats can reduce your levels of bad cholesterol.

Monounsaturated fats are mainly found in olive, rapeseed (vegetable) and walnut oils, avocados, nuts and seeds. These fats can reduce your levels of bad cholesterol and increase your levels of good cholesterol. It is recommended to choose monounsaturated fats (rather than saturated fats) where possible, particularly if you also have diabetes.

Some foods are naturally high in cholesterol, such as eggs and seafood. These do not usually need to be avoided as they do not have significant impact on the cholesterol in your blood, compared to eating foods which are high in saturated fat.

Cooking methods

Try using some of these cooking methods to help reduce the less healthy fats in your diet:

- Bake, grill, steam, boil, poach or microwave food instead of frying. You can also roast food without adding extra fat.
- Avoid adding lard, dripping or oil to meat when cooking.
- If you have to use fat in cooking, use a small amount of olive, sunflower or rapeseed oil or use spray oil (measure out one teaspoon for each person you are cooking for).
- Trim excess fat from meat and remove the skin from poultry.
- Make gravy using stock cubes and water from the potatoes or vegetables, instead of using meat juices.
- Use low fat yoghurt or crème fraiche instead of cream in sauces.
- Grating cheese and using one with a stronger flavour such as mature cheddar will mean you will need less in sandwiches and sauces.

Other suggestions:

Instead of:	Try:
Whole milk, evaporated milk, condensed milk, whole milk powder	Semi-skimmed milk, skimmed milk, skimmed milk powder
Full fat cheeses e.g. cheddar, cheshire, cream cheese, gouda, stilton, paneer	<p>Medium fat cheeses e.g. brie, camembert, edam, feta, mozzarella, reduced fat cheddar, reduced fat paneer, smoked cheese</p> <p>Low fat cheeses e.g. cottage cheese, curd cheese, low fat cheese spreads, ricotta</p>
Butter, ghee, lard, dripping, coconut oil and palm oil	Spreads high in unsaturated fats e.g. vegetable, olive, corn, soya or sunflower oils
Salad cream, mayonnaise and vinaigrette dressings	Low fat or virtually fat free salad cream or mayonnaise, vinaigrette made with olive oil
Thick and creamy yoghurts, fromage frais, Greek yoghurt, cream and cream substitutes	Low fat or virtually fat free yoghurts and fromage frais
Fatty meat products e.g. belly pork, burgers, corned beef, duck, faggots, frankfurters, liver, sausage, pate, pasties, pies, salami, sausages, streaky bacon	Quorn or lean meats e.g. beef, chicken, game, lamb, pork, rabbit and turkey (remove visible fat and skin), black pudding
Chips, crisps, scratchings, chocolate, toffee, fudge, cakes, biscuits, Bombay mix, pies, pasties	Crispbreads, plain, unsalted nuts (not betel or brazil nuts), trail mix, cereal bars, currant bun, malt loaf

Eat more fruit and vegetables

Eating a diet that is rich in a variety of fruit and vegetables can also help to protect your heart health.

Aim to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day

One portion is approximately:

- a 150ml glass of fruit juice (maximum one per day due to high sugar content)
- one apple or orange (or similar-sized piece of fruit)
- one handful of grapes, berries or cherries
- two satsumas, kiwi fruit or plums
- one tablespoon of dried fruit
- one small bowl of mixed salad
- three heaped tablespoons of cooked vegetables, like peas or sweetcorn
- three heaped tablespoons of beans or pulses
- four heaped tablespoons of spinach or green beans



These can be fresh, frozen, dried or tinned in juice or water.

Eat more fibre

Foods high in fibre help to fill you up, making you feel fuller for longer, and they are low in calories. They can also help to keep your bowels healthy.

Soluble fibre found in oats, peas, beans, lentils, fruit and vegetables may also help to lower blood cholesterol.

Try to go for wholegrain options, like granary or seeded wholemeal bread, brown rice and pasta and wholemeal chapattis to increase your fibre intake even more.



Use beans and lentils to replace some of the meat in stews and casseroles.

Remember to aim to drink six to eight cups or glasses of fluid (this includes tea and coffee) every day to help prevent constipation.

Eat oily fish

Oily fish such as herring, kippers, mackerel, pilchards, salmon, sardines and fresh tuna contain **omega-3 fats** that can help to protect your body against heart disease and strokes.

Try to include fish twice a week, one of these being oily fish.

One portion of oily fish = about 100g or 4oz

You can make healthier choices by having tinned fish in water or tomato sauce, rather than oil, and limiting fried fish and fish in batter.

For women who are planning a family, are pregnant or who are breastfeeding, it is recommended that a maximum of two portions of oily fish is eaten a week.

Other sources of omega-3 fats include dark green vegetables, cereal and soya products, probiotic drinks (yoghurt drinks with added omega-3 fat), walnuts, omega-3 eggs and rapeseed oil.

Omega-3 fats are also available in capsule form and are often added to food products available at most supermarkets. However, the latest evidence and guidelines suggest that there is no added benefit of taking omega-3 fish oil supplements or supplemented foods for heart health. It is recommended that you talk to your GP if you are considering omega-3 supplements as they may have an impact on the dose of some medications.

Use less sugar

Too much sugar or too many sugary foods can raise levels of triglycerides in your blood.

Watch out for hidden sugar in cakes, biscuits, sweet puddings, sweets, chocolate, squash and fizzy drinks.

Do not add sugar to food or drinks.

If you need to sweeten foods, try an artificial sweetener (such as Canderel or Sweetex) in place of sugar.

Choose fruit, low fat and low sugar yoghurts or sugar-free jelly to replace sugary puddings or snacks.

Use no-added-sugar or sugar-free squash and cordial, and diet fizzy drinks.



Use less salt

Cutting down salt in your diet reduces the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, strokes and some types of cancer.

Adults should have less than 6g (one teaspoon) of salt a day – including salt in processed foods.

Most of the salt we eat is hidden in foods such as breakfast cereals, soups, sauces, ready meals, salty snacks, stock cubes and cured meat.

How to eat less salt:

- Avoid adding salt at the table
- Use as little salt in cooking as possible
- Flavour foods with herbs, spices, mustard and pepper instead of salt
- Limit the amount of processed foods you eat
- Choose no-added-salt or reduced salt options where possible

Watch your alcohol intake

Alcohol can also put more strain on your heart, possibly putting you at risk of high blood pressure, abnormal heart rhythms, strokes and some cancers.

What are the recommended alcohol units and guidelines?

Men and women: a maximum of two units in one day, and a maximum of 14 units a week, with two to three alcohol free days.

One unit is approximately:

- a small glass of wine (125ml); a medium glass of wine (175ml) is one and a half to two units)
- half a pint of ordinary beer, lager, cider or bitter
- a pub measure (25ml) of spirits (one shot)

This will change depending on the strength of beers and wine.

In a week, you should allow one to two alcohol free days to let your liver recover. If your blood triglyceride levels are raised, drinking less alcohol may be beneficial.

Alcohol can contain hidden calories which can contribute to weight gain so try to choose low calorie options.

Beware of 'diet' beers or 'low carbohydrate' beers, as they are often stronger (and, therefore, worse for your blood triglycerides) than ordinary beers.

Food labelling

Food labels can be confusing and so the table below contains guidelines that tell you if a food is high in total fat, saturated fat, salt and sugar or not, which can be helpful when making healthy food choices, such as avoiding too much saturated fat or sugar:

A lot per 100g of food	A little per 100g of food
22.5g of sugars	2g of sugars
17.5g of fat	3g of fat
5g of saturated fat	1.5g of saturated fat
3g of fibre	0.5g of fibre
1.5g of salt	0.3g of salt

A healthy weight

Maintaining a healthy body weight can help to keep your heart healthy too.

This can stop excess fat building up around your body and in the arteries around your heart.

- Try filling up on extra fruit and vegetables at meal times, as they are healthy and do not contain many calories.
- Include one portion of starchy food at each meal – wholegrain if possible.

These are low fat ways of keeping you fuller for longer.

Your questions

Should I avoid eggs?

Although eggs do contain cholesterol, they do not need to be avoided. Sources of cholesterol in foods do not have much impact on the cholesterol in your blood – it is saturated fat that does this. It is foods high in saturated fat that should be avoided.

Should I drink more red wine?

Some studies suggest that alcohol may reduce the risk of heart disease, but until more evidence is available, you should follow current recommendations. If you do not drink it, do not start but if you do drink it, follow current government guidelines for how much you can have.

Do I need to take a fish oil supplement?

Dietary supplements can be expensive and are unnecessary if you are eating oily fish regularly. Current evidence suggests no added benefit from taking fish oil or omega-3 supplements for heart health. If you wish to take omega-3 or fish oil supplements, there is no evidence of harm; however, it is advised to discuss this with your GP as it may have an impact on the dose of some medications.

Should I use cholesterol-lowering foods such as margarines and yoghurts?

Evidence suggests that these products can help lower cholesterol. However, they need to be used in conjunction with a healthy balanced diet and can be expensive. If you would like to include these products in your diet, it is important to check on the label how much of the products are needed to have an effect as this can vary. A healthy balanced diet should be all you need.

Are artificial sweeteners bad for my health?

Many studies have been carried out looking at the impact of artificial sweeteners on health. No strong evidence has been found to show that sweeteners are bad for your health.

While artificial sweeteners are designed to help people satisfy their sweet tooth without adding the calories found in sugar, it is a good idea to consume them in moderation – just like everything else. Also, switching to these sugar-free products should be just one part of your plan to start living healthily, and should be combined with a low-fat, healthy diet and regular exercise.

Where can I find out more about diet and heart disease?

The following websites have more information:

British Heart Foundation: www.bhf.org.uk

Heart UK: www.heartuk.org.uk

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Dietitians on 01384 244017 (8.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday)

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dudleygroup.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email dgft.patient.information@nhs.net

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

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