

Nutrition and Dietetics

Eat Your Way To A Healthy Heart



An information leaflet on how to maintain a healthy diet to protect your heart.

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Heart disease and stroke are the largest cause of death in this country. The risk of developing these diseases can be reduced by choosing a healthier lifestyle such as not smoking, eating a healthy diet and taking regular exercise.

Other factors which will effect your risk of heart disease:

- Being overweight;
- Having high blood cholesterol;
- Family history;
- High blood pressure;
- Having diabetes or impaired glucose tolerance.

There are several steps you can take to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke:

- Be smoke free;
- Eat a healthy diet with plenty of fruit, vegetables and omega 3 fats;
- Keep your weight within a healthy range;
- Aim to be physically active at least 30 minutes a day (discuss suitable exercise with your doctor);
- Keep within the recommended limits of alcohol;
- Learn to deal with stress effectively.

Getting the balance right

A healthy diet includes a good variety of foods from five different food groups.

The Eatwell Plate model displays these food groups and the proportions needed for a healthy diet (see our fact sheet titled 'Healthy eating; getting the balance right')

Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein

This group also includes poultry, eggs, nuts, beans, lentils and vegetarian alternatives such as tofu, soya and Quorn.

Oily fish, such as mackerel, sardines, salmon and pilchards contain omega 3 fatty acids which are known to be protective to the heart. Try to include oily fish in your diet once a week and aim for at least 100g (3-4 oz) per portion.

If you have had a heart attack the recommendations are to have two to four portions of oily fish per week. If you do not eat fish more information on omega 3 can be found at www.vegsoc.org/omega3.pdf.

Soya may have additional benefits to heart health— see the BDA factsheet on soya and health at www.bda.uk.com

Milk and dairy foods

These foods are important sources of protein and vitamins and minerals (such as calcium). They are important for growth and repair and help build healthy bones and teeth.

Where possible try to choose reduced fat milks (skimmed or semi-skimmed), diet yoghurts and a reduced fat cheeses (low fat cheddar, edam, brie, camembert, cottage cheese).

Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables provide vitamins, minerals, fibre and antioxidants that help protect your heart. Aim to have at

least five servings a day. One serving is equal to:

- three tablespoons of vegetables;
- a dessert bowl of salad;
- a piece of fresh fruit;
- two tablespoons stewed/canned fruit;
- a glass (100ml) fruit juice;
- Frozen, tinned and dried varieties all count towards your daily intake.

Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods

This group also includes rice, pasta, chapatti, yams and plantains. These starchy carbohydrates are important in providing energy and a food from this group should be eaten at each meal.

Choose higher fibre choices, such as wholegrain, wholewheat and granary which help protect against constipation. If you need to maintain your weight, fill up with these instead of biscuits and crisps.

Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar

These foods can be part of a healthy diet but they should not be eaten too often.

Sugar

Try to stick to low sugar products to help maintain a healthy weight and prevent tooth decay.

So why eat less fat?

Having a lot of fat in your diet (particularly saturated fats) can lead to raised blood cholesterol and encourage weight gain.

Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a type of fat which is mostly made by the liver but also supplied by our diet. Our body needs cholesterol to form cell membranes and hormones.

There are two types of cholesterol that you need to be aware of; 'good' cholesterol and 'bad' cholesterol.

LDL-cholesterol (bad): If there is too much of this it can build up in cells and arteries to form fatty streaks and plaques.

HDL- cholesterol (good): This type of cholesterol is returning to the liver to be eliminated from the body. Having high levels of LDL-cholesterol can increase the risk of developing heart disease or having a stroke.

While cholesterol is present in some foods such as eggs and shellfish, most of the cholesterol in our blood is made from the **saturated fat** in our food. Cutting down the saturated fat in your diet can help reduce your blood cholesterol.

Saturated fats: These raise LDL-cholesterol levels in the blood. They are found mainly in animal products such as butter, lard, full fat dairy products, fatty meat and meat products e.g. sausages, pies and burgers.

Eating less saturated fat helps maintain normal blood cholesterol.

Monounsaturated fats: These do not increase LDL-cholesterol and may help to decrease it. The main sources of monounsaturated fat are olive oil, rapeseed (canola) oil, peanut oil, peanuts, pecans, almonds and avocado pears. Replace saturated fats with monounsaturated fats where possible.

Polyunsaturated fats: These are found in plant oils such as sunflower, corn and soya oils. Monounsaturated oils and spreads should be used in preference to these.

Cholesterol lowering products

There are currently two main cholesterol lowering margarines available, namely Benecol and Flora Proactiv.

Other products such as yoghurts and cheese spreads have also been developed. These products can reduce the absorption of dietary cholesterol and may help reduce blood cholesterol if part of a healthy diet. However, these products tend to be expensive when compared to other suitable products.

Other steps you can take to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke

Use less salt in cooking and avoid adding it at the table. Tinned and packet foods are high in salt so try to use more fresh foods. This is particularly important if your blood pressure is raised.

Do not have more than the recommended number of units of

alcohol (with two to three alcohol free days) per week.

Making a start

If you decide to make changes to your diet, it is often helpful to do it gradually. Start by making two or three changes to your diet. Possible goals could be to;

- Choose spreading fats which are high in monounsaturated fats for example Bertolli, Utterly Butterly, Butterlicious (Sainsburys), Butter Me Up (Tesco);
- Always remove any visible fat from meat before cooking;
- Try changing from full fat milk to semi-skimmed or skimmed milk;
- Try using herbs and spices to flavour foods instead of salt;
- Look for ready meals which contain less than 15g of fat per portion;
- Choose breakfast cereals which are higher in fibre such as Shredded Wheat and Weetabix;

If you are trying to lose weight:

- Reduce crisps, sweets, sugary drinks, biscuits and cakes; limit to one to two times per week;
- Have jacket , boiled or mashed potatoes (without butter/ margarine) instead of chips;
- Grill foods instead of frying whenever possible;
- Have fried foods no more than once a week;
- Have more fruit as snacks;
- Use less oil in cooking and choose monounsaturated varieties such as olive or rapeseed oil.

If you are trying to gain weight:

- Have more snacks such as toast, crumpets, muffins, tea cakes, sandwiches, fruit loaf, cereals, plain biscuits, yoghurt and dried fruit;
- Use thicker slices of bread;
- Use olive oil/rapeseed oil, generously, in cooking.

If you are concerned about your diet or have any queries regarding this advice please contact a dietitian at Bedford Hospital

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