



look after your heart

One adult dies every three minutes in the UK as a result of heart disease. We can help ourselves reduce the risk of heart disease by choosing a diet that contains plenty of wholegrain foods, fruit and vegetables, with the right balance of fats and low in salt.

Eating for a healthy heart

Face the fats

A high-fat diet, particularly one that is high in saturated fats, found in fatty cuts of meat, full-fat dairy products and many processed foods, increases levels of harmful LDL cholesterol in the blood, which increases our risk of heart disease.

Monounsaturated fats, found in olive oil and rapeseed oil, help lower LDL cholesterol but have no effect on protective HDL cholesterol.

Polyunsaturated fats, found in sunflower oil, can also help lower LDL cholesterol, but eating too much of them may lower the levels of protective HDL cholesterol as well.

- Whatever fat you chose to use its important to use it in moderation. To reduce fat in cooking always choose low fat ingredients such as fish and lean meat and cooking methods, such as stir frying or steaming that require little or no extra fat.

Fill up on fibre

Soluble fibre, found in oats, beans and some fruit and vegetables, can help reduce harmful LDL cholesterol by encouraging the body to excrete it before it can be absorbed into the blood stream. Fruit, vegetables and wholegrain foods also contain

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antioxidants that can help prevent LDL cholesterol from becoming oxidised and deposited in the blood vessels, which will lead to narrowing of the arteries and increased risk of heart disease.

- Eat at least five servings of fruit and/or vegetables and at least three servings of wholegrain foods a day.

Try something fishy

Oil-rich fish such as salmon, mackerel and fresh tuna are rich in omega-3 fats which help to increase protective HDL cholesterol. They also help to protect the heart by making the blood less likely to clot, by lowering blood pressure and by encouraging the muscles lining the artery walls to relax, improving the blood flow to the heart.

- Eat at least two servings of fish a week, one of which should be an oil rich variety.

Wholegrain foods and vegetables

Wholegrain foods and green leafy vegetables are a good source of the B vitamins B6, B12 and folate, which help reduce levels of homocysteine.

Homocysteine is an amino acid (a building block of protein) normally found in your body. High levels of homocysteine in the blood increase risk of heart disease by causing the blood vessels that deliver the blood to the heart to become thickened and scarred. Cholesterol then builds up in the scarred arteries.

Nibble a nut

Nuts are rich in monounsaturated fats and other heart-friendly compounds that help reduce LDL cholesterol and increase HDL cholesterol.

Seek out soya

Studies show that including 25g of soya protein a day in our diet can help reduce LDL cholesterol levels.

Go easy on the alcohol

For men over the age of 40 and women who have passed the menopause, alcohol in moderation (one to two units a day) can increase HDL cholesterol, and reduce the risk of heart disease by up to 30%. However, high intakes of alcohol can increase the risk of heart disease.

Cut back on salt

A diet which is high in salt can increase our risk of high blood pressure, which in turn can increase our risk of heart disease and stroke.

What else can we do?

Watch that weight

Obesity increases the risk of several health problems, including heart disease. One quick way to find out if we need to lose weight is to measure ourselves round the waist.

Waist measurement for	Need to lose weight above
European men	94cm (37")
Asian men	90cm (36")
European & Asian women	80cm (32")

Aim to be physically active

Aim to exercise for at least 30 minutes, five times a week. It's not necessary to do the 30 minutes in one go – three 10 minute sessions can be just as good, if that's easier.

If you smoke – give up

Heavy smokers are four times more likely to have a heart attack than non-smokers.



For references please see our website.

Wholegrain Goodness
www.wholegraingoodness.co.uk

British Cardiac Society
www.bcs.com

British Dietetic Association
www.bda.uk.com

British Heart Foundation
www.bhf.org.uk

British Nutrition Foundation
www.nutrition.org.uk

Heart UK
www.heartuk.org.uk

Joint Health Claim Initiative
www.jhci.co.uk

Topic sheets are free to download from our website.

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