Heart Healthy Diet
Information for patients, relatives and carers

ⓘ For more information, please contact:

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Caring with pride
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Healthy eating for your heart

Healthy eating for your heart is called a cardio-protective diet. Following a cardio-protective diet can help to reduce the risk of developing, or further progressing heart disease and can help to maintain a healthy weight.

A cardio-protective diet is also referred to as a Mediterranean style diet. Following a Mediterranean diet includes the following:

- Regular meal pattern with meals based around wholegrain starchy carbohydrates, e.g. wholegrain cereals, brown rice, wholewheat pasta, potatoes with skin or wholegrain bread.
- Increasing fruit and vegetable intake.
- Reducing saturated fat intake and replacing these with (unsaturated) heart healthy fats.
- Including fish and other lean sources of protein.
- Including three to four portions of unsalted nuts or seeds each week.
- Reducing the amount of sugar in your diet.
- Reducing the amount of salt in your diet.
- Maintaining a healthy weight.
Basing meals around wholegrain starchy carbohydrates

It is important to have a regular meal pattern, with meals based on wholegrain starchy carbohydrates, because this helps to maintain energy levels and reduce cravings. Wholegrain starchy carbohydrates contain more fibre than white or refined carbohydrates. Fibre plays an important part in our heart and bowel health. It may help to reduce cholesterol and also helps to keep us feeling fuller for longer.
Why choose wholegrain?

A diet that contains limited amounts of processed foods is associated with lower cardiovascular risk.

Reducing the amount of refined carbohydrates, such as white bread and processed cereals, and having wholegrain starchy carbohydrates is an important part of a heart healthy diet.

Wholegrain starchy carbohydrates include:

- Wholemeal/wholegrain/granary/seeded breads, pittas, chapattis. 50/50 bread is also suitable.
- Wholewheat pasta.
- Brown rice or wholegrain basmati rice.
- Wholegrain breakfast cereals or whole oats (such as Weetabix, Shredded Wheat, Branflakes, All Bran, Porridge) – choose lower salt and sugar varieties.

For example:

**Breakfast:** Wholegrain cereals or granary toast.

**Lunch:** Sandwich made with wholemeal bread or a salad with wholewheat pasta /brown rice or potatoes with their skins left on.

**Evening meal:** Base your meal around potatoes with skins, wholewheat pasta, brown rice, wholewheat noodles or grains such as bulgur wheat.
Fruits and vegetables

Try to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables per day as this helps to protect your heart as they are a good source of fibre and also vitamins and antioxidants. Try to include a variety of fruits and vegetables and include them with meals where possible. This can include fresh, frozen, dried or tinned (in natural juice/unsalted water) fruit and vegetables.
What is a portion?

80 grams (g) of fresh, canned or frozen fruit and vegetables, or 30g of dried fruit. Some portions only count once in a day such as 150ml fruit juice/vegetable juice or smoothie, or 80g of beans and pulses. Some examples are listed below:

- One medium apple/pear/banana/peach (80g).
- Handful of strawberries/grapes/cherries (80g).
- One heaped tablespoon of dried fruit (30g).
- Two satsumas/plums/kiwis.
- Handful of vegetable sticks.
- Two florets of broccoli or cauliflower.
- Three heaped tablespoons of peas, sweet corn, cooked vegetables.
- A handful of cherry tomatoes.
- Cereal bowl of mixed salad.
- One medium glass (150ml) of orange juice. (only one glass per day is counted as a portion).
- Beans and pulses: three heaped tablespoons (80g) (count as a maximum of one portion per day).
How can I include more fruit and vegetables in my diet?

- Have fruit or raw vegetables as snacks.
- Add salad to your sandwiches.
- Include fruit in puddings and cereals.
- Store tinned/frozen vegetables for convenience.
- Make soups with leftover vegetables.
- Aim to have some fruit or vegetables at each meal.
Fats

Saturated fat

Saturated fat increases the bad cholesterol in the blood. High levels of bad cholesterol increases the risk of heart disease. Saturated fats come mainly from animal sources such as:

- Meat and meat products (sausages, burgers, pies).
- Butter, lard.
- Cheese, cream, ice-cream.
- Pastries, cakes, biscuits and other processed foods.

Saturated fats can also be found in coconut and palm oil.
Unsaturated fat ("heart healthy" fat)

Unsaturated fats are also known as "heart healthy" fats as they can help to reduce levels of bad cholesterol in the blood. It is therefore recommended to replace saturated fats with unsaturated fats which are generally found in vegetable/plant based products such as:

- Olive and rapeseed oils
- Seeds
- Avocado
- Nuts
- Sunflower
- Soya
- Sesame

Unsaturated fat is also found in oily fish.

Unsaturated fats are as high in calories as saturated fat, so it is important to use in small amounts to help maintain a healthy weight.
How can I reduce my intake of saturated fats and replace saturated fat with unsaturated fat?

- Limit processed meats, e.g. salami, sausages, bacon, pastrami and meat pastries
- Use fat free cooking methods such as grilling, steaming, microwaving, boiling or baking
- Choose lean cuts of meat and remove all visible fat. Remove skin from poultry
- Use reduced fat dairy products:
  - Skimmed/semi skimmed/1% fat milks.
  - Cottage cheese or reduced fat hard cheese—use a strong flavour and try grating to make a small portion go further.
  - Low fat/diet/light yoghurts.
  - Plain low fat yoghurt or fromage frais in place of cream, sour cream or crème fraiche in recipes.
- Reduce high fat snacks such as cakes, biscuits, crisps and pastries.
- Use low fat salad dressings and mayonnaise.
- Choose margarines and oils high in heart healthy fats, e.g. olive oil, olive based spread, sunflower spread etc.
- Snack on fruit or heart healthy fats such as unsalted nuts and seeds.
- Bulk up main meals with plenty of vegetables, beans and pulses.
Fish and other lean proteins

- As meat can be high in saturated fat, choosing lean alternatives such as fish and vegetarian sources of protein helps to promote heart health.

- It is recommended to include two 140g portions of fish per week, one of which should be oily. Oily fish includes tinned, fresh or frozen varieties of sardines, mackerel, kippers, salmon, herring, trout, pilchards and fresh or frozen tuna (tinned tuna does not count as an oily fish).

- Vegetarian sources of protein include beans, pulses and lentils. These foods are high in fibre, vitamins and minerals and low in saturated fat.

- We should aim to have two to three portions of protein a day.

- A portion would be around a palm sized piece of meat or chicken, or a full hand sized portion of fish. One egg is a portion as is three tablespoons of lentils or beans or 30g of nuts.
Nuts

- Regularly including nuts in your diet is associated with lower total cholesterol and lower bad cholesterol in the blood. Aim to have three to four 30g portions per week.

- Choose nuts that are raw and unsalted, and avoid those which are roasted or covered in salt or sugar. Nuts are low in saturated fat, but high in unsaturated fats and calories so stick to a 30g portion. Nuts can count as one of your portions of protein. Try adding unsalted cashews, walnuts or peanuts to stir fries, a rice salad or a try a nut loaf.
Sugar sweetened beverages

Soft and fizzy drinks can be very high in sugar and therefore very high in calories, and contain few nutrients. Drinking soft and fizzy drinks every day can result in a high intake of sugar which has been linked to an increased risk of heart disease. Therefore, it is recommended to reduce our intake of sugar sweetened beverages; this will also help to maintain a healthy body weight.

Squash and cordials can contain up to five teaspoons of sugar in one glass of diluted drink. Lemonade and colas can have up to eight teaspoons of sugar per 330ml can. Try replacing sugar sweetened beverages with no added sugar squash, or low sugar and sugar free drinks for your whole family.

Swap sugary drinks for sparkling water or soda water with a slice of lemon or a dash of fruit juice, or even ‘diet’ versions. Energy and sports drinks can also contain a lot of calories – check the label.
Salt

A high intake of salt may increase our blood pressure and put extra strain on our heart. It is recommended that we should cut our salt intake to a maximum of 6g of salt per day (around one teaspoon). We currently consume around 8.1g of salt/day (one and a half teaspoons). About three quarters of the salt we eat is hidden in processed foods. These tips can help to reduce your salt intake:

- Use little or no salt in cooking and at the table; this includes rock salt, sea salt and garlic salts.
- Use different flavouring instead, e.g. lemon, pepper, herbs and spices or garlic.
- Salt substitutes, e.g. Lo-Salt or SoLo are not recommended.
- Look at the food labels and choose lower salt options e.g. stock cubes, soya sauce, baked beans. Choose tinned foods in water instead of brine or salted water. There can be a really big difference between different food types and brands.
- It is best to eat meals which are prepared yourself from fresh ingredients where possible, but if you are having ready meals try to choose those which are labelled low in salt.
- Foods high in salt may display a red traffic light label, foods with medium amounts are indicated by an amber traffic light label, and those low in salt may have a green traffic light on the front of the packet (See page 21).
The main foods that are high in salt are:

- Salty meats and processed meat products, such as ham, bacon, gammon, sausages, pate and salami.
- Canned, packet and instant soups.
- Ketchup, soy sauce, mayonnaise, salad cream, pickles.
- Stock cubes, gravy powder and salted flavourings.
- Smoked meat and fish, prawns and anchovies.
- Meat and yeast extracts.
- Salted snacks like crisps, salted nuts, salted biscuits, popcorn.
- High salt ready meals, sauces and takeaway meals.
- Pasta sauce.
- Pre-prepared sandwiches.
- Cheese – have no more than 100g per week.
Alcohol

For a heart healthy diet it is advisable to keep to the recommended alcohol guidelines. Alcohol has almost as many calories in it as fat so being aware of the number of alcoholic drinks you have as this can also help you maintain a healthy weight. The NHS recommends:

- Both men and women are advised to **avoid having more than 14 units** of alcohol per week, to keep health risks from drinking alcohol to a low level.

- If you do drink as much as 14 units per week, it is best to spread this evenly over three days or more.

- If you wish to cut down the amount you’re drinking, a good way to help achieve this is to have several alcohol free days each week.
What is a unit?

Units are a way of measuring a drinks alcohol content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drink Description</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Calories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>125ml of 12% wine</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>85 kcal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>175ml of 12% wine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>120 kcal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250ml of 12% wine</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>170 kcal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pint of lower strength lager/beer/cider (3.6%)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>74 kcal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pint of stronger strength lager/beer/cider (5.2%)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>230 kcal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can of lager/beer/cider (440ml, 5%)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>170 kcal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single measure / 25ml of spirit (40%)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>61 kcal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Drinks with higher percentage (%) of alcohol will contain more units of alcohol.
Maintaining a healthy weight

Maintaining a healthy weight is recommended as a part of a heart healthy diet. If you are overweight, to lose weight you could try to:

- Cut down on fats.
- Cut down on puddings.
- Limit snacks or snack on fruit.
- Have more fibre in your diet (this can help stop you feeling hungry in-between meals).
- Make sure you have regular meals and include starchy food at each meal.
- Increase activity/exercise.
- Reduce your portion sizes – aim for your plate to look like this:

  - Half Vegetables/salad
  - Quarter Carbohydrate: Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta
  - Quarter Protein: Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat

Please discuss any concerns with your doctor. Your doctor can refer you to a dietitian if you need more help and information.
Reading the labels

Nutrition labels are usually found on the back or the side of food packaging. The full nutritional information is provided per 100g of the product.

Some foods now have the nutritional information displayed on the front of the packaging. This is usually given per portion or serving, be aware that the serving on the pack may be different to the amount that you plan to eat.

Some products combine colour coding with the nutritional information. Colour coded labelling makes it easy to see at a glance if a product is high (red), medium (amber) or low (green) in different nutrients. Aim to mainly choose products coded green, have amber products occasionally and limit the number of red products.
## Colour coding on food packaging

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All measures per 100g</th>
<th>Low (green)</th>
<th>Medium (amber)</th>
<th>High (red)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fat</strong></td>
<td>3g or less</td>
<td>Between 3g and 17.5g</td>
<td>More than 17.5g, or more than 21g per portion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saturated fat</strong></td>
<td>1.5g or less</td>
<td>Between 1.5g and 5g</td>
<td>More than 5g, or more than 6g per portion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sugars</strong></td>
<td>5g or less</td>
<td>Between 5g and 22.5g</td>
<td>More than 22.5g, or more than 27g per portion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Salt</strong></td>
<td>0.3g or less</td>
<td>Between 0.3g and 1.5g</td>
<td>More than 1.5g, or more than 1.8g per portion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Meal ideas and healthy snacks

Breakfast ideas

- Wholegrain breakfast cereal with skimmed/ 1% or semi-skimmed milk.
- Porridge (made with water, skimmed/ 1%/ semi skimmed milk) with fruit.
- Wholemeal toast/ muffin with low fat spread.
- Scrambled/poached/boiled egg on wholemeal toast.
- Add a piece of fruit for one of your five a day.

Lunch ideas

- Jacket potato with reduced salt and sugar beans/ reduced fat cheese/ tuna and salad.
- Vegetable based soup (not tinned/powdered due to salt content) with wholemeal roll.
- Mackerel/ tuna/ chicken salad with wholemeal bread/ wholewheat pasta /brown rice or potatoes with their skins left on.
- Roasted vegetables and pesto panini.
- Sandwich (wholemeal bread, pitta bread, wraps or rolls) with meat/ fish and salad.
Evening meal ideas

Lean mince based meals served with extra vegetables or salad such as:

- Spaghetti Bolognese
- Cottage Pie
- Lasagne
- Chilli Con Carne (made with beef or lentils).
- Savoury mince and potatoes/dumplings.

Meat and fish meals such as:

- Chicken/turkey and vegetable stir fry with wholewheat noodles.
- Fish with boiled potatoes, mixed bean salad or vegetables.
- Lean grilled meat with potatoes/rice/noodles/pasta with vegetables.
- Use herbs and spices to make fish and meat more flavoursome.
Vegetarian meals such as:

- Wholewheat pasta with roasted vegetables and beans in tomato sauce.
- Vegetable omelette with boiled potatoes or two slices of wholemeal bread.
- Vegetable and chickpea curry with rice.
- Cashew nut stir fry with brown rice.
- Nut loaf and jacket potato.
- Lentil rissoles with boiled potatoes.

**Snack ideas**

- Fruit
- Two to three plain biscuits (Rich Tea, Morning Coffee, Digestive, Ginger).
- Diet or light yoghurt.
- Slice of wholemeal toast.
- Small bowl of wholegrain cereal.
- Raw vegetable sticks with reduced fat dip.
- Three to four crackers (e.g. oat cakes/wheat/seeded crackers) with low fat soft cheese.
- Handful of nuts/seeds/dried fruit.
- Plain unsalted popcorn.
Useful websites

**British Heart Foundation** – view or download healthy eating booklet
https://www.bhf.org.uk/heart-health/preventing-heart-disease/healthy-eating

**NHS Healthy Choices** – Healthy eating and NHS weight loss plan
http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/healthy-eating/Pages/Healthyeating.aspx

**NHS Healthy Choices** – Love your heart
http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Healthyhearts/Pages/Lifestylechanges.aspx

**Change for life** – Daily tips to cut down on sugar
http://www.nhs.uk/change4life/Pages/sugar-swap-ideas.aspx

**Change for life** – Healthy snacks
http://www.nhs.uk/Change4Life/Pages/healthy-snacks.aspx
Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:
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Teaching, Training and Research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

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An answer phone is available out of hours.
Listening in order to improve ● Always doing what we can to be helpful
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Braille  Audio e.g. CD
Large print  Electronic

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