# Making the most of your food the healthy way (cardio protective)

A cardioprotective diet is a heart-healthy diet rich in fibre, fruits, vegetables, and oily fish, that can help lower blood cholesterol and blood pressure, reducing the risk of stroke and heart disease.

When your appetite is low or you are unintentionally losing weight, it is important to choose calorie and protein-dense foods. Making the right food choices will ensure you get the nourishment you need.

If you have diabetes, some of the suggested foods will increase your blood glucose levels.

However, if your appetite is poor and you need to gain weight, it is important that you focus on eating well and having healthy snacks. Try to limit the amounts of sugary snacks you have in between meals.

Monitor your blood sugar levels carefully and if you are concerned, please discuss with your GP or diabetes team.

## Some helpful tips

- Eat little but often - Aim for three small meals and three snacks daily.
- Try to eat in company; it is helpful to improve your appetite.
- Aim to have your main meal at the time of the day you feel most well.
- Keep yourself hydrated; your body needs enough fluids (1.5-2 litres) to work properly. Milk, fruit juice, water, tea, coffee can be counted towards fluids.
- Limit fruit juice and smoothies to 150ml per day due to the high levels of free sugars they contain.
- Try to avoid drinking before your meals as you may find that this fills you up.
- Add extra sauces/unsalted nuts and seeds/low fat spread /avocados/ low-fat cheese to your main meals to increase calorie content.
- Keep your mouth and teeth clean as this helps you to enjoy your meals as well as helping your general health and wellbeing.
- Consider a multivitamin supplement (consult with your pharmacist before taking them to check for any interactions if you are on any other medication).

## Understanding fats

Fat supplies the body with energy, essential fatty acids, and aids in the absorption of vitamins A, D, E, and K.

However, consuming excessive amounts of unhealthy fats and salt can increase your risk of stroke or heart disease.

Trans fats, commonly found in processed and takeaway foods, are linked to a higher risk of heart disease. Reducing your intake of these foods is a key way to lower trans-fat consumption. Cooking from scratch with fresh ingredients is a great alternative.

Saturated fats, primarily found in animal products, are associated with increased levels of harmful LDL cholesterol.

Substituting saturated fats with moderate amounts of healthy fats, such as monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, can help lower harmful cholesterol levels. The table below outlines which foods contain each type of fat.

## Source of fats

### Saturated fats

- Processed and fatty meats like sausages, ham, burgers and bacon.
- Hard cheeses like cheddar. Whole milk, cream and ice cream.
- Butter, lard, ghee, suet, palm oil

### Polyunsaturated fats

- Oily fish: kippers, mackerel and salmon.
- Rapeseed oil, sunflower oil and corn oil.
- Some nuts like walnuts, pine nuts, sesame seeds and sunflower seeds.

### Monounsaturated fats

- Peanut butter, almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, peanuts and pistachios.
- Rapeseed oil, olive oil, olives and avocados

### Trans fats

- Fried foods and takeaways.
- Snacks like biscuits, cakes, pies and pastries.
- Hard margarines made with hydrogenated oil.

## Fibre

Dietary fibre, sometimes called roughage, is a type of carbohydrate that is not fully broken down during digestion. In the UK, adults are recommended to eat around 30g of fibre per day.

Eating foods high in fibre can help lower cholesterol by reducing how much cholesterol is absorbed into the bloodstream from the digestive system (intestine).

Here are some tips to increase fibre intake in the diet:

- Aim to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables each day.
- Include a portion of pulses such as lentils, beans and chickpeas in your meals.
- Include wholegrain or high-fibre starchy carbohydrates with your evening meal, such as potatoes with the skins on, wholewheat pasta, brown rice or bulgar wheat.
- Choose handful of nuts and seeds as snacks.
- Add plenty of salad to your sandwiches.
- Swap sugary breakfast cereals for wholegrain options or oats.

## Food labels

All packaged food items are required to include nutritional information on the label, helping us make healthier choices. The nutrition panel, typically found on the back or side of the packaging, provides details per 100g and/or per serving, allowing for easy comparisons between similar products.

Some products also feature a traffic light system on the front of the package.

The traffic light indicators for fat and saturated fat per 100g are shown below:

| | Low (per 100g) | Moderate (per 100g) | High (per 100g) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Total fat** | 3g or less | 3g to 17.5g | more than 17.5g |
| **Saturated fat** | 1.5g or less | 1.5g to 5g | more than 5g |
| **Total sugars** | 5g or less | 5g to 22.5g | more than 22.5g |
| **Salt** | 0.3g or less | 0.3g to 1.5g | more than 1.5g |

For heart health, it is important to focus on limiting saturated fat rather than total fat.

A product marked with a 'red' label should be consumed sparingly and less frequently. It is best to focus on eating more products with green and amber labels.

## Healthy swaps to include proteins and calories

Swap whole milk for semi skimmed milk or 1% fat milk and fortify this with semi skimmed milk powder. See last page. You can use this in drinks, soups, sauces, puddings, lassi and on cereals.

Choose wholegrain or wholemeal varieties whenever possible, as they are higher in fibre, vitamins, and minerals compared to refined options. For example, wholemeal pitta bread, oats, brown rice, wholewheat pasta, and wholegrain cereals are excellent choices.

Try to have protein-rich foods such as meat, poultry, fish, and eggs at least three times a day. Vegetarian sources are cheese, beans, pulses, lentils, nuts, dhal, soya, Quorn, cottage cheese or tofu.

Try to have a few meat-free days each week by replacing red meat with fish or plant-based alternatives mentioned above. When you do eat meat, opt for lean cuts and remove any visible fat.

Aim to have two portions of fish a week, one of which should be an oily fish. Oily fish includes salmon, sardines, trout, mackerel, herring, sprats, kippers, and tuna (fresh).

Choose low or reduced fat versions of cheese and yogurts.

Fry food in rapeseed/olive oil or add olive oil spread to foods
Include one to two puddings a day e.g. low-fat yoghurts, rice pudding, custard, mousse, fruit pie, canned or stewed fruits with custard, crumbles, kheer (sweet rice and low fat milk), sago, or semolina.

## Physical exercise

Consistent physical activity helps your body remove ‘bad’ cholesterol (non-HDL cholesterol). You do not need to join a gym. Including some form of movement each day like going for a walk or taking the stairs instead of the lift can help and may also improve your mood, energy and sleep.

## Sample meal plan

### Breakfast

Wholegrain cereal or porridge with fortified milk and dried/fresh fruit.
**OR** Stuffed paratha with low-fat spread and yoghurt
**OR** wholegrain toast with low-fat cream cheese, avocado and egg.

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### Mid-morning

Portion of fruit with nut butter/hummus
**OR** small handful of mixed unsalted nuts.

Tea/coffee/fortified milk.

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### Lunch

Macaroni made with low fat cheese with vegetables
**OR** sandwich/roll with soup with extra low-fat butter/cheese added on top.

Fruit custard
**OR** crumpets with low-fat cream cheese
**OR** one pot of low-fat yoghurt

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### Mid afternoon

Milky drink with rich tea biscuit/banana/low-fat crackers/rice cakes with cream cheese/nut butter.

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### Evening meal

Chicken/fish pie, potato and stir fried vegetables in olive oil.

**OR** chicken sausages with baked beans and mashed potato with low fat butter/cheese.

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### Late evening

Rice cake/oats cracker with nut butter/avocado spread.

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### Bedtime

Hot chocolate/Horlicks/Ovaltine in semi-skimmed milk.

## How to make fortified milk

Take four tablespoons skimmed milk powder and mix with one pint semi-skimmed milk.

Store in a fridge and use it as ordinary milk.

## Disclaimer

Produced by dietitians at University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust (UHB).

If you require this information in another format, such as a different language, large print, braille or audio version please ask a member of staff or email interpreting.service@uhb.nhs.uk

## References:


**Cardiovascular disease: risk assessment and reduction, including lipid modification**
www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng238

**Fat facts – British Dietetic Association (BDA)**
www.bda.uk.com/resource/fat.html

**HEART UK – The Cholesterol Charity**
www.heartuk.org.uk/

**Healthy eating - reduce your risk of developing heart disease – British Heart Foundation**
www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/support/healthy-living/healthy-eating


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