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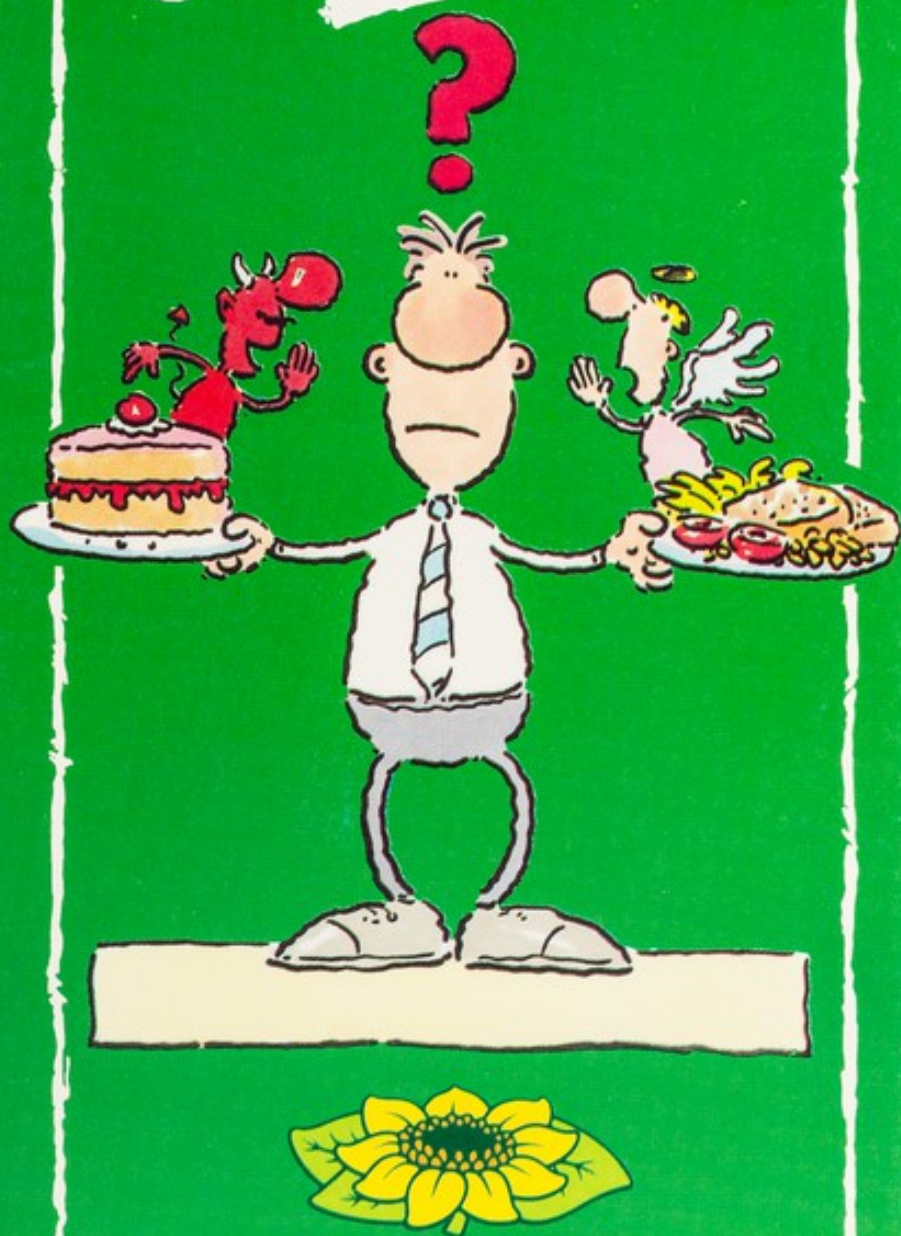
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Food Choices



How does diet affect heart disease?

For many people, eating a poor diet leads to fatty deposits developing inside the walls of arteries. Over the years, these fatty deposits can build up narrowing the arteries, obstructing blood supply. If the vital arteries of the heart become narrowed or blocked, the result can be a heart attack.

These fatty deposits contain large amounts of a substance called blood cholesterol. Everyone has cholesterol in their blood, but people who have heart disease usually have a higher level than others.

High blood cholesterol levels are caused mainly by what we eat and it's the amount and type of fat in our diets that affects it most – rather than cholesterol in food (dietary cholesterol), as is commonly thought.

There are three different types of fat to consider...

Saturated Fats – A diet high in saturated fat increases the level of blood cholesterol which in time increases the risk of heart disease – so we should try and reduce the amount of saturated fat we eat.

Saturated fats are found in high quantities in animal products like fatty cuts of beef, lamb and pork as well as in hard margarine and lard. They are also in dairy products like full-fat milk, cheese and butter.

Surprisingly, a cheddar cheese sandwich can contain as much as a third of the average daily saturated fat intake! Most cakes, biscuits, pies and pastries also contain a lot of “hidden” saturated fat.

Monounsaturated Fats – are found in high proportions in olive oil and avocado pears. They do not increase blood cholesterol levels and some experts believe that they may help to reduce them.

Polyunsaturated Fats – These can help lower excess blood cholesterol. Polyunsaturates are found in vegetable oils like sunflower, soya, corn and safflower and in products made from them, like margarines labelled “high in polyunsaturates”. Oily fish like mackerel, sardines and pilchards are an excellent source of another type of polyunsaturates which help prevent blood from becoming too “sticky” and forming clots.

Polyunsaturates contain "essential fatty acids" which are vital to health. It is important to try and eat much less fat altogether and to partially replace saturated fats with some polyunsaturated fats.



What choices can I make?

The next time you reach for an item on the supermarket shelf – STOP and check the label – ingredients are listed in order of quantities. Ask yourself "Is this a healthier alternative to what I normally buy?" – Try to buy foods high in polyunsaturates or high in fibre, particularly soluble fibre – watch out for those high in fat, especially saturated fat, sugar or salt.

Choose these :

1. Cottage cheese, low-fat cheese or cheese alternatives which are made with sunflower oil
2. Skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, low-fat natural yogurt or low-fat fromage frais
3. Sunflower margarine, low-fat spreads, oils and fats which are high in polyunsaturates
4. Lean meat, poultry and fish
5. Grilled, poached or steamed foods
6. High-fibre wholegrain varieties of bread, breakfast cereals, rice, oats, pasta, beans and pulses
7. Fresh vegetables, fruit or canned fruit in natural juices
8. Mayonnaise alternatives and salad dressings which are high in polyunsaturates or low in fat



Starting Young

It's never too soon to start healthy eating. Habits formed in childhood can last a lifetime. Encourage your children to eat plenty of fresh and home cooked foods rather than convenience meals, fatty snacks and chips with everything. But remember – don't make your kid's diet too rigid as growing children need lots of energy. So make sure they fill up on lots of wholemeal bread, cereals, fruit and vegetables.



In preference to these:

1. Cheddar cheese, Stilton and other full fat cheeses
2. Whole milk and cream
3. Butter, hard margarine and fats, lard or suet
4. Fatty meat and meat products (pies, sausages, pâtés)
5. Fried foods
6. White bread and pre-sweetened breakfast cereals
7. Canned fruit in syrup, cakes, biscuits and sweets
8. Traditional mayonnaise and oily salad dressings which are not high in polyunsaturates



Food for thought

The traditional British diet has surrendered! After years of attack by health professionals in magazines, newspapers, books and TV programmes – old eating habits are finally being swept away. It's now clearly understood that good diet is linked to good health.

Eating a poor diet has been linked to a battery of illnesses. Obesity, heart disease, digestive problems, even some cancers can all follow bad eating habits. But ill health doesn't happen overnight. It can take many years to develop, often with no outward signs. But the good news is that changing to a healthier diet and lifestyle can help prevent these, and many other diseases.

And opting for a healthy diet need not be hard work, a few simple changes can soon put you on the right road:

- Reduce the total amount of fat you eat especially saturated fats and partially replace with polyunsaturated fats. Eat more fresh fish, lean meat and poultry, rather than high saturated fat foods such as sausages and burgers.
- Increase your intake of fibre rich starchy foods, such as wholemeal bread and pasta, baked jacket potatoes, high fibre breakfast cereals, oats and pulses.
- Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Cut down your sugar by opting for unsweetened fruit juices or low calorie soft drinks and eating less sugary foods such as cakes, puddings, sweets and biscuits.
- Limit the quantity of salt you take by using less in cooking and at the table and by eating fresh fruit instead of salty crisps and nuts – which are also high in fat.



Risk Factors - the big 6

Remember that making the wrong food choices is one of several factors causing heart disease – there are five others to bear in mind. Your best bet for minimising the risk of heart disease is to tackle all six together.

Help your heart by making healthier food choices

Excess weight puts a strain on your heart

Avoid a high blood pressure

Relax and reduce your stress levels

Take regular exercise

You should try to give up smoking

As a start, collect all six leaflets in this series and act today to give your heart a healthy boost. Look after it and it will look after you.



For more information...

...contact The Flora Project for Heart Disease Prevention
24-28 Bloomsbury Way, London WC1A 2PX
071-242 0936 or any of the organisations listed below...

British Heart Foundation, 14 Fitzhardinge Street,
London W1H 4DH

Coronary Prevention Group, 60 Great Ormond Street,
London WC1N 3HR

Health Education Authority, Hamilton House,
Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9TX

ASH – Action on Smoking and Health,
5/11 Mortimer Street, London W1N 7RH

Sports Council, 16 Upper Woburn Place, London WC1H 0QP

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