

## **Eating to manage your cholesterol / The Flora Project.**

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# Eating to manage your Cholesterol



The Flora Project



## Maintain a healthy heart

Most of us know someone who wants to look after their heart. In fact, coronary heart disease kills more people in the UK than any other disease. This leaflet gives essential information on how to reduce your risk of coronary heart disease by helping to maintain a healthy heart.

There are a number of ways we can maintain a healthy heart. Medical research shows that one important way is to carefully manage our diet to reduce our levels of cholesterol.

## What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a wax like substance produced mostly in the liver, from which many other substances including hormones are made. Cholesterol in the blood stream occurs as two main types: LDL (bad) cholesterol and HDL (good) cholesterol. High levels of HDL (good) cholesterol are actually good for maintaining the heart's health. LDL (bad) cholesterol is the type which can build up on the walls of the arteries and increase your risk of coronary heart disease. High blood cholesterol levels are usually caused by the amount and type of fat in the diets that we eat and can cause blood vessels to gradually get blocked and become narrower. This build up of cholesterol can happen very slowly. As the blood vessels become narrower, so the flow of blood to the heart muscle is reduced which can in turn lead to a heart attack.

## Should I be managing my cholesterol?

There is no doubt that most of us could benefit from lowering our cholesterol levels. Doctors recommend that it is especially important if you answer yes to some of the following questions:

- Are you watching your blood cholesterol level?
- Is a member of your family watching their blood cholesterol level?
- Is your blood pressure at an unhealthy level?
- Have you been told by your doctor that you have a heart problem?
- Does your family have a history of heart disease?
- Do you smoke?
- Are you overweight?





## How you can reduce your cholesterol

Doctors recommend that a healthy diet - one that is low in fat (especially saturated fat) and salt and containing plenty of fruit, vegetables and fibre will help prevent cholesterol build-up and reduce the risk of coronary heart disease.

There are five types of fat and fatty substances of interest:

**Polyunsaturated Fats** - In moderation, these can help lower blood cholesterol and help maintain a healthy heart.

Polyunsaturated fats are found in vegetable oils like sunflower, corn and in products made from them, like spreads labelled "high in polyunsaturated fats". Oily fish like mackerel, sardines and pilchards are also a good source.

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

**Saturated and Trans Fats** - A diet high in saturated and trans fats increases the level of blood cholesterol which in time increases the risk of heart disease - so medical experts recommend that we should try and reduce the amount of saturated and trans fats we eat. These fats are found in high quantities in animal products like fatty meat and meat products, as well as in some hard margarines and lard. They are also in dairy products like full-fat milk, cheese and butter.

**Plant Sterols** - New spreads are now available in your supermarket which can dramatically reduce cholesterol. They contain added ingredients, called plant sterols, which can prevent the absorption of cholesterol in the body. Plant sterols are ingredients which already occur naturally in small amounts in the diet as they are present in vegetable oils - these spreads have larger amounts added.

By using these spreads each day as part of your normal healthy diet, you could dramatically reduce your cholesterol. As with all dietary changes, it is important to stick with it in order to successfully maintain your new lower cholesterol level.



## Heart health maintenance

It is important to remember that diet is only one element of keeping in good health and maintaining a healthy heart.

Physical activity is another important element. Try to be active for at least 30 minutes at moderate intensity 5 days a week. Walking, swimming and cycling are the best all round forms of physical activity. Start slowly and build gradually - the right level should leave you breathless not speechless. If you've not taken any exercise for some time, are over 40, have been ill or have any joint problems, check with your family doctor or practice nurse before doing anything too strenuous.

## There are other important factors too:

- Avoid smoking
- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Be more physically active
- Ask your GP or Practice Nurse whether you should have your blood pressure checked
- Learn to control your stress and take time to relax



# Be Pro-active

## Manage your cholesterol

### Dietary changes

1. Base each meal on a starchy carbohydrate food e.g. bread, potatoes, rice, pasta, chapatti - try to choose wholegrain ones whenever you can.
2. Increase the amount of fruit and vegetables that you eat to at least five portions every day (1 portion = 2 tablespoons of vegetables, 1 whole fruit (e.g. a banana or an apple) or 2-3 small fruits (e.g. satsumas or plums), 1 small bowl of salad, 1 small glass of fruit juice).
3. Try to eat pulses like baked beans or red kidney beans.
4. Try to eat fish regularly, especially the oily types of fish (including tinned) which you should try to eat once or twice each week e.g. salmon, mackerel, pilchards, trout etc.
5. Buy the leanest cuts of meat whenever possible and limit fatty meat products such as pies, pastries, sausages and burgers.
6. Choose lower fat dairy foods e.g. skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, reduced fat cheese, low fat yoghurts whenever possible.
7. Instead of fried food, try to eat grilled, poached, steamed or microwaved food.
8. If you drink, keep within sensible limits.





Remember that cholesterol is one of several risk factors for heart disease - there are five others to bear in mind.

Collect all 6 leaflets in this series: **Smoking, Blood Pressure, Weight, Eating to Manage Your Cholesterol, Physical Activity and Stress and Relaxation.**

## Planning for Change

Whilst reading this leaflet you may have found things which you feel you could change - why not record them here. Remember that it is easier to make one small change at a time than trying several big changes all at once. Make your changes simple and achievable.

### I Will...

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....

## For more information...

...Speak to your family doctor or practice nurse

Or contact any of the organisations below:

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

**Health Education Authority**, Trevelyan House, 30 Great Peter Street, London SW1P 3HW

**QUIT - The National Society for Non-Smokers**, Victory House, 170 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 0HA

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



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To register for more information please call us on

**0800 027 1322**