

Patient information

Cardioprotective diet

A cardioprotective diet (a healthy diet high in fibre, fruit and vegetables and oily fish) can help improve blood cholesterol and blood pressure and reduce your risk of having a stroke or heart disease. A high intake of fat and salt can increase your risk of having a stroke or heart disease.

Fat

We need some fat in our diet, however too much fat can lead to weight gain and can increase blood cholesterol. The main types of fats are saturated and unsaturated fats.

Saturated fat - Saturated fat is a type of fat that can increase LDL ('bad') cholesterol.

Foods that are typically high in saturated fat include:

- Full-fat dairy products
- Meat and meat products such as pasties, sausages and pies
- Biscuits
- Cakes and pastries
- Chocolate
- Butter
- Coconut milk and oil

Unsaturated fat - Unsaturated fat can help lower LDL cholesterol and increase HDL ('good') cholesterol.

Foods that are typically high in unsaturated fat include:

- Sunflower oil/olive oil/rapeseed oil
- Avocado
- Nuts
- Oily fish

Oils and spreads still contain a lot of calories so if you are trying to lose weight only have a small amount of these.

Aim to have a few meat free days a week - swap meat for fish or vegetarian meat alternatives (e.g. pulses, Quorn, soya). If you are having meat, choose lean meat and cut off any visible fat.

Choose low fat dairy products such as cheese, yoghurts, butter and milk.

Replace saturated fat with unsaturated fat e.g. swap butter for oil based spreads.

Add less fat when cooking - try to grill/steam/poach foods rather than frying.

Omega 3 - Omega 3 is a type of fat that can help protect your heart. Oily fish is the best source of omega 3, but it can also be found in seeds, nuts and some vegetable oils (e.g. rapeseed oil).

These foods are also a good source of vitamin A, D and protein.

Try to eat two portions of fish per week, one of which should be oily. The best sources of omega 3 from oily fish are mackerel, kippers, pilchards, tuna (fresh), salmon, and sardines.

Eat a variety of fish - if possible buy local fish or fish from environmentally friendly sources. To help lower your salt intake, keep smoked and tinned fish to no more than once a week.

Fibre

Fibre can help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease. Choose high fibre foods such as wholemeal bread, pasta, rice and cereals; beans, pulses, nuts. Fruit and vegetables are also a good source of fibre as well as vitamins. Aim for 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

Salt

Salt contains sodium, which can raise blood pressure. Aim for less than 6g salt per day. Choose lower salt options on food labels and try not to add any salt when cooking or on the table. Choose pepper/herbs/spices rather than salt alternatives such as 'Lo-salt'.

Alcohol

Alcohol can raise blood pressure and increase the risk of having a stroke. Alcohol is high in calories so if you are trying to lose weight reduce the amount you are drinking.

The recommended allowances are 14 units or less per week for men and women. Try to spread the units out over the week and have a few alcohol free days.

Sources of information

British Dietetic association; British Heart Foundation; Heart UK; Stroke association

Important information

This patient information is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

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Other formats

If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department - Tel: 0300 131 4500.

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your dietitian or other healthcare professional.

Reference

The Clinical Specialty/Unit that have agreed this patient information leaflet:
Nutrition and Dietetic Department.

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