The British Heart Foundation and healthy eating

There are lots of good reasons for you and your family to eat healthily. A good diet, in combination with being physically active, is an important part of staying healthy and making sure that children grow well. It can help you to maintain a healthy body weight and also keep your blood cholesterol levels and blood pressure down. So this means that, in the long term, it can also help to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease, strokes, certain forms of cancer, and diabetes.

Eating well

The British Heart Foundation (BHF) thinks that, as well as being 'good for you', eating healthily should be enjoyable too. If it's enjoyable, you're more likely to carry on eating healthily. Eating a wide variety of foods means you won't get bored with your food, as you'll be able to eat foods with lots of different tastes and textures and maybe even try some new foods too.

Eating healthily is great for all ages. It's a good idea to get younger family members in the habit early, but it's never too late to start. Working on eating healthily as a family is a great challenge, and doing it together means you can support each other to make changes that last, too.

The BHF wants to help you choose the best sorts of foods for you and your family, and to be able to combine these into a balanced diet. This booklet will give you all the information you need, as well as practical tips and ideas for how you can put it all into practice.

Eating well is for everyone who wants to look after their health, eat more healthily and reduce their risk of heart disease. So – whether you're eating at home or eating out, whether you're having a lazy day or you're on the run – we're here to help you make healthier food choices... and enjoy doing it!

This guide does not replace the advice your health professionals may give you based on their knowledge of your condition.
What is heart disease?

The most common form of heart disease among adults is called **coronary heart disease**. It happens when the coronary arteries – the arteries that bring oxygen-rich blood to your heart muscle – become blocked or narrowed because of fatty deposits called atheroma.

**Angina** is the chest pain or discomfort that can occur when your heart does not get enough blood and oxygen because the coronary arteries have become narrowed. Angina can be brought on by physical activity or emotional stress, or it can sometimes happen when you are resting.

If a piece of atheroma breaks off it may cause a blood clot to form. This blood clot may block the coronary artery, causing part of the heart to be starved of oxygen-rich blood and may become permanently damaged. This is a **heart attack**.
What increases the risk of heart disease?

Coronary heart disease is more likely to happen if you have certain risk factors. (A risk factor is something that increases the risk of getting a disease.) The main risk factors for coronary heart disease are:

- smoking
- high blood pressure
- high blood cholesterol
- physical inactivity
- being overweight
- diabetes, and
- having a family history of coronary heart disease.

High blood cholesterol can increase your risk of developing coronary heart disease. A common cause of high blood cholesterol levels is too much fat in the diet, especially saturated fat. Occasionally people can have high levels due to an inherited condition. Cholesterol is carried around the body by proteins. These combinations of cholesterol and proteins are called lipoproteins.

There are two main types:

**LDL** (low density lipoproteins) is the harmful type of cholesterol. This is sometimes called LDL cholesterol.

**HDL** (high density lipoproteins) is a protective type of cholesterol. It is sometimes called HDL cholesterol.

High blood pressure (hypertension) can increase your risk of getting coronary heart disease, and having a stroke. The following can all increase the risk of high blood pressure: being overweight, eating too much salt, drinking too much alcohol, and physical inactivity.

What is heart disease?
The eatwell plate shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group. This includes everything you eat during the day, including snacks.

So, try to eat:

- plenty of fruit and vegetables
- plenty of bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods – choose wholegrain varieties whenever you can
- some milk and dairy foods
- some meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein
- just a small amount of foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar

Look at the eatwell plate to see how much of your food should come from each food group. You don’t need to get the balance right at every meal. But try to get it right over time such as a whole day or week.

Try to choose options that are lower in fat, salt and sugar when you can.

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What is healthy eating?

There are no single foods or ‘one size fits all’ menus that you need to follow to eat healthily. All foods can be included in a healthy, balanced diet. You just need to make sure you get the right balance.

The best way to understand it is to think of foods in food groups. We need lots of foods from some food groups, and less foods from other groups. The eatwell plate above shows how to balance the different food groups to make up a healthy, balanced diet.
Despite what many people think, healthy eating really isn’t about excluding foods. It’s about eating a wide variety of foods, but just eating them in the right proportions.

A lot of people say healthy eating is about eating everything in moderation, but this isn’t strictly true. We need to eat more of some things and less of others.

So how much should we be eating of the different food groups each day and why?