Eating a healthy heart

To reduce your risk of heart disease, it’s important to consider other aspects of your diet as well as watching your saturated fat and salt intake. It is important to eat a diet that is high in fruit and vegetables, high in fibre, and low in salt.

Healthier choices

Healthy snacks

Biscuits, cakes, pastries and fried savoury snacks. Snacks such as crisps, savoury and cream cheeses, and savoury chocolate bars are often high in saturated fat. Healthier snacks include plain and low-fat pitta bread and pitta wraps, low-fat cheese, plain and low-fat crackers, fruit salads and smoothies.

Get more active

Being active is another great way to help you reduce your risk of coronary heart disease, and to control your weight. Aim to do at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity, on at least five days of the week. Think cycling, walking or swimming are all ideal.

Enjoy your food!

Remember there are many delicious foods you can eat, while also looking after your heart.

Food and drinks high in fat

Fat spreads

Butter, lard, ghee, salt, spreading. Hard margarines (ones where hydrogenated oil or partially hydrogenated oil or fat or hydrogenated oil or fat or partially hydrogenated oil or fat or partially hydrogenated oil or fat or partially hydrogenated oil or fat) is the first or second item on the list of ingredients. Spreads with more than 10% fat.

Offs

Soft cheeses such as Brie, Camembert, goats’ cheese and cream cheese. Foie gras, pâtés.

Breads

Bread spread thickly with butter. Breads made with flour such as wholewheat, paratha and pitta. Shop-bought garlic bread.

Milk and dairy foods

Milk full-fat or extra cream milk. Evaporated or condensed milk.

Meat, fish, eggs and beans

Tear up your fat

As a rough guide, an average woman should have no more than 30g of saturated fat a day (and up to 70g of total fat). An average man should aim to no more than 40g of saturated fat a day (and up to 95g of total fat). Less is even better, especially if you want to lose weight.

Food GROUP

Food

Vegetables

Deep-fried vegetables, vegetables served with butter

EAT OR CASUALLY

Canned vegetables containing salt (brine and from heat) or pickled.

THE HEALTHIEST (HOUSES)

Frisées or fresh vegetables, or vegetables canned in water.

Vegetable juices. (Three portions a day points towards your 5-a-day target.)

Home-made vegetable soups. Vegetable soups and stews in a small amount of oil such as sunflower, rapeseed or olive oil.

Fruit

Fruit blended in buttermilk. Fruits in yoghurt in a small amount of oil (such as sunflower, rapeseed or olive oil) with or without sugar.

Breads

Bread spread thickly with butter. Breads made with flour such as wholewheat, paratha and pitta. Shop-bought garlic bread.

Milk

Full-fat or extra cream milk. Evaporated or condensed milk.

Cheeses

Reduced-fat cheeses, eg, fat-free cheddar, parmesan, medium fat cheddar. String cheese sticks (eg, mature cheddar or parmesan) used in small amounts for flavouring.

Yogurts, fromage frais and cream

Single-serve yogurts, double- or triple-sweet cream. Cream substitute that is high in fat such as creme fraîche.

Meat and meat products

Fat meat (eg, belly pork, breast of lamb, goose) or the fat from the edge of meat. Sausages, frankfurters, bangers, meatballs and sausages. Smokey bacon. Pickled meat, preserved pork and potted pies. Meat products can be deceasingly high in fat, eg, some wrapped in flaky pastry such as sausage rolls.

Poultry and poultry products

Duck and goose. Poultry with skin. Chicken nuggets, chicken drumsticks.

Fish and fish products

Deep-fried fish butter or breadcrumbs. Fish served in batter or with thin fish fillets (eg, haddock or salmon, hot, sauce, butter sauce, seafood cocktail sauce or a Curry). Canned fish in oil or brine.

Eggs

Eggs fried in oil or Mars bars, chocolate bars, ice cream, chocolate milkshakes. (Because of the pastry.) Cars are eggs.

Rice and seeds

Cooked rice, brown rice, and millet (uncooked). Peanut butter. Roasted nuts in oil and salt.

Beans, peas, lentils, and pulses

Indian dal, which tends to be high in glycaemic index (clifden butter). Deep-fried Quorn. Vegetarian burgers that are high in fat.

Fat spreads

Rice cakes, chocolate or cream-coated chocolates. Rich chocolate or fruit cake.

Oils

Olives which have been reconstituted several times.

Savoury snacks

Creamy dips. Frozen foods (eg, savoury crisps or Bombay mix).

Food and drinks high in fat and/or sugar

Fat spreads

Butter, lard, ghee, salt, spreading. Hard margarines (ones where hydrogenated oil or partially hydrogenated oil or fat or hydrogenated oil or fat or partially hydrogenated oil or fat or partially hydrogenated oil or fat or partially hydrogenated oil or fat) is the first or second item on the list of ingredients. Spreads with more than 10% fat.

Salad dressings, sauces, and gravies

Mayonnaise, salad dressing; blue cheese dressing, horseradish sauce. Roux sauces, which use fat (often butter) and flour. Cream-based sauces. Goumed with the fat from cooking meat or poultry.

Biscuits, cakes, pastries and confectionery


Canned or dried (then boiled) beans, peas and lentils. (Rinse first if canned in salt or sugar.)

Sorbet.

Meringues (without cream).

Milk puddings using semi-skimmed milk. (These count as 1 portion a day towards your 5-a-day target.)

Free from oil.

Reduced-fat coconut milk. Reduced-fat cream ingredients. Vegetable soups or bean soups. Vegetarian sausages or beanburgers.

Reduced-fat cream ingredients.

Reduced-fat rice cakes. Reduced-fat chocolate. Reduced-fat bread. Reduced-fat butter. Reduced-fat cheese, reduced-fat cheese, reduced-fat soft cheese, reduced-fat soft cheese.

Potatoes mashed with semi-skimmed or skimmed milk and a little olive oil. Thicker, reduced-fat deep-fried chips.

Reduced-fat pizza or potato wedges cooked in small amounts of oil such as sunflower, rapeseed or olive oil.

Reduced-fat pâtés.

Half-fat crème fraîche.

Reduced-fat pâtés.

Reduced-fat pâtés.

Reduced-fat snacks.

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Eating out and takeaways

If you are overweight, remember that the amount of food you eat, as well as the type of foods, is important. For more helpful hints, see our booklet Guide to food labelling or our website (www.bhf.org.uk/publications).

Choosing healthier fats

There are two main types of fat in our diet – saturated fat and unsaturated fat. Too much saturated fat can increase the amount of cholesterol in your blood, raising your risk of heart disease. Converting to healthier fats is especially important for people who are at risk of developing heart disease, or who have already had a heart attack.

Unsaturated fats are a healthier choice. They include polyunsaturated fat (such as those found in vegetable oils) and monounsaturated fat (such as those found in olive oil).

Saturated fats are solid at room temperature and include part of a group of chemicals called ‘fatty acids’. Saturated fats are mainly found in animal products, but you can also find some in certain plant foods. It is important to reduce your intake of saturated fats to avoid raising your blood cholesterol levels, which may help reduce the risk of coronary heart disease.


dont forget to read the food labels

The Guide to Food Labelling is available from our website www.bhf.org.uk/publications. In the guide, we explain how to interpret different types of food labels. High fat content is indicated by a red traffic light, medium fat content by an amber one, and low fat content by a green one.

Helpful hints

As a guide to what is high, medium or low fat by weight or volume, in our guide we list the amount of fat and saturated fat per 100g of food. To maintain a healthy heart, cut down on the unsaturated fats. Try eating bigger helpings of breads, pulses, fish, oily fish, avocadoes, and olive oil or rapeseed oil. These foods provide some ideas for you. At mealtimes, include more oily fish*, nuts, seeds, and unsalted nuts or seeds (eg, sesame seeds, flaxseeds, pumpkin seeds or almonds).

* People are advised to have no more than 4 portions of oily fish a week. Pregnant or breastfeeding women should have no more than 2 portions a week. If you are underweight, you may need to put some weight on. Or, if you are already a healthy weight, cutting down on the amount you eat, as well as the type of foods, is important. For more helpful hints, see our booklet Guide to food labelling or our website (www.bhf.org.uk/publications).

** Too thin?**

If you are underweight, you may need to put some weight on. Or, if you are already a healthy weight, cutting down on the amount you eat, as well as the type of foods, is important. For more helpful hints, see our booklet Guide to food labelling or our website (www.bhf.org.uk/publications).

About the British Heart Foundation

The British Heart Foundation is the nation's heart charity, saving lives through pioneering research, patient care and vital information.

Other BHF resources

The British Heart Foundation also produces other educational materials that may be of interest. To find out about these go to our Heart health catalogue please go to: bhf.org.uk/publications or call our BHF Orderline on 0870 086 6666 or email orderline@bhf.org.uk. You can download many of our publications from bhf.org.uk/publications

What you can do for us

We rely on donations to continue our vital work. You would like to make a donation to the British Heart Foundation, please ring our credit card hotline on 0870 086 3339 or contact us through our website at bhf.org.uk/donate or send it to us at the address below.

Acknowledgements

Edited by the British Heart Foundation and Nutricia

Whatever’s on your mind, we’re here to help. As the nation’s heart charity we’re pioneers in heart research and it’s our job to provide care and support for those living with heart disease. We don’t need to be unwelcome to call us, you can chat to us about anything you like. Whether you need help, heart health information or if you just want to talk to someone...