

EATING FOR A HEALTHY HEART: VEGETARIANS



A good diet, rich in fruit, vegetables, wholegrain cereals and low in saturated fat and salt is a key part of managing raised cholesterol. Whilst vegetarian diets are generally thought to be healthy, care should be taken to ensure that there is an adequate intake of key nutrients (protein, iron and calcium) and those foods high in fat are eaten in moderation.

1. **Be a healthy weight** for your height. A good guide is your waist measurement which should be measured at the widest point. Ideally it should be less than 94cm (37 inches) in men and less than 80cm (32 inches) in women.
2. **Avoid saturated fats** found in butter, ghee, full fat dairy foods and coconut oil. Replace these with fats high in monounsaturated fatty acids found in olive oil and rapeseed oil or fats high in polyunsaturates found in sunflower oil, corn oil and soya oil.
3. **Include a variety of pulses** (dahls (lentils), peas, beans), nuts, seeds, soya and other vegetable proteins during the day.
4. Remember **vegetarian convenience foods** can be quite high in fat. Always check the label. A lot of fat is 20g or more per 100g. A lot of saturated fat is 5g or more per 100g.
5. **Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables** – at least 5 portions a day. A portion is: 1 glass of fruit juice, a dessert-bowl of salad, a medium sized fruit, 2 tablespoons raw, cooked, canned or frozen vegetables. Cook vegetables lightly in a minimum of water to retain the nutrients.
6. Make **starchy foods** like cereals, pasta, rice, chapattis, potatoes, noodles and bread the basis of most meals. Try to include wholemeal or wholegrain varieties.
7. Have 2-3 portions of the **low fat dairy foods** per day. If avoiding dairy foods, choose calcium fortified soya products.
8. Include foods rich in “**omega 3’s**”. For those that eat fish, oily fish is the best source of the long chain omega 3’s which can help lower triglycerides and improve circulation. Try to include 2-3 portions per week. White fish and seafood contain smaller amounts of these omega 3’s.
 - Shorter chain omega 3’s can be found in plant based foods - vegetables (especially dark green leafy types) cereal products, nuts (walnuts, almonds, peanuts) linseeds and soya products (tofu, soyabeans).
 - Unfortunately our bodies are very inefficient at converting the short chain omega 3’s to the longer more beneficial omega 3’s (EPA + DHA).
 - If you don’t eat fish you can supplement your diet with fish oil from the health food store. Look out for the magic ingredients EPA and DHA and try to ensure a supplement that provides at least 500mg – 1g per day of EPA and DHA combined.
9. Restrict your **salt intake**. Reducing the amount of salt that you eat will help lower your blood pressure. As much as three quarters of salt comes from processed foods so check out those labels. Some products label salt, others label sodium. As a guide:
 - **A lot of salt is 1.25g salt or more per 100g (0.5g sodium or more per 100g).**
 - **A little salt 0.25g salt or less per 100g (0.1g sodium or less per 100g)**

You can convert sodium to salt by multiplying by 2.5.
8. Enjoy **alcohol** with food but keep to **sensible limits**. Try to limit to no more than 2-3 units each day. A unit is a half-pint of normal strength beer, lager or cider or a pub measure of sherry or spirits. A typical pub measure of wine is now around 2 units.
9. Although having a healthy diet is a central part of reducing cholesterol levels, it is only one aspect of living a **healthy lifestyle**. Changing diet, losing weight, being more active and stopping smoking should all contribute to lowering your cholesterol levels. For some people it may be necessary to use medication to further reduce cholesterol to acceptable limits.