

Words Anita Bean



10

WAYS TO
BETTER
HEART
HEALTH

It's the time of year when our thoughts naturally turn to matters of the heart, but looking after this vital organ is a job for life. Make a few small changes to your diet now, and you'll be reaping the benefits for years to come

Coronary heart disease is the number one killer in the UK and is responsible for one in four deaths, according to the British Heart Foundation. Yet many of the risk factors for heart disease are lifestyle-related – the result of everyday choices we make about what to eat, how much to exercise and whether or not to smoke. This may sound scary, but it also means that making just a few simple changes to your diet and lifestyle can have a significant and tangible effect on your risk. Plus, it's never too early or too late to start! Try taking a few of these steps today. Your heart – and your loved ones – will thank you for it.

1 EAT A HANDFUL OF NUTS EVERY DAY

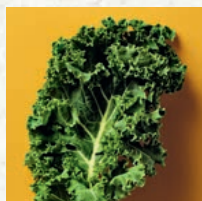
They're full of heart-healthy unsaturated fats, fibre, protein, vitamin E and minerals, plus they are known to have a cholesterol-lowering effect when eaten as part of a healthy diet. In a study of more than 210,000 people published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* (JACC), those who consumed five or more servings of nuts a week had a 20% lower risk of heart disease than those who rarely ate them. Heart UK recommends 30g nuts a day – a small handful.

2 CHOOSE OLIVE OIL AND AVOCADOS

Replacing saturated fats (in red and processed meats, full-fat dairy products, cakes and biscuits) with unsaturated fats (in olive oil, vegetable oils, avocados, nuts and seeds) helps reduce blood cholesterol levels. A 2022 JACC study showed that substituting 2 teaspoons (10g) of butter and dairy fat with olive oil daily was associated with a 34% lower risk of death caused by heart disease. A study in the *Journal of the American Heart Association* found that eating an avocado a week (in place of the same quantity of saturated fat) can cut your risk of heart disease by more than a fifth.

'It's never too early or too late to adopt healthier eating habits'

THE TOP FOODS FOR HEART HEALTH



GREEN LEAFY VEG such as spinach, kale or broccoli

BERRIES including strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries

WHOLEGRAINS in the form of oats, barley, brown rice, rye, millet or spelt



NUTS & SEEDS like walnuts, pistachios, almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, pumpkin or sunflower seeds

3 GIVE BEANS, LENTILS AND PEAS A CHANCE

Pulses contain significant amounts of fibre, which has been shown to help reduce levels of LDL ('bad') cholesterol in the blood. Researchers found that eating just 130g (about half a tin) of beans, peas, chickpeas or lentils a day reduced 'bad cholesterol' by 5%, lowering the risk of heart disease by 5-6%. Pulses make good alternatives to meat because they are lower in saturated fat and higher in fibre. Start by swapping half the meat in a bolognese sauce for lentils or adding some chickpeas to your curry.



4 GET YOUR 5 A DAY

Whether fresh, frozen, dried or juiced, fruit and veg provide vitamins, minerals, fibre and phytonutrients (plant nutrients) that help protect your heart. Berries, in particular, are rich in beneficial plant compounds known as anthocyanins, which give them their vibrant red, blue and purple shades. Researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health found that women who ate more than three 80g servings of blueberries or strawberries a week had a 34% »

lower risk of heart attack compared to those who ate fewer. Anthocyanins help make blood vessels more elastic, which may lower blood pressure.

5 ADD SOYA TO YOUR DIET

Soya-based foods such as tofu, tempeh, edamame beans and unsweetened alternatives to milk and yogurt are low in saturated fat. Substituting them for full-fat dairy, meat and other foods high in saturated fat can help reduce your blood cholesterol. Heart UK recommends 2-3 servings a day (one serving is 100g tofu, 80g edamame beans or 250ml soya milk). Use soya milk in smoothies and porridge or in tea and coffee.

6 STAY A HEALTHY WEIGHT

When our weight increases, cholesterol production does too. Losing 10% of your body weight can help lower your levels of cholesterol and triglycerides – another type of blood fat – as well as reducing your blood pressure and the chance of developing type 2 diabetes, both of which are risk factors for heart disease.

7 TRY YOGA

Stress is a major risk factor for heart disease, and yoga is an excellent way of reducing it. A 2016 study (encompassing a review of 37 other studies) showed that regular yoga can be as effective as more strenuous forms of exercise when it comes to heart health. Working the muscles and mindful breathing have the dual benefits of helping to lower blood pressure and relieve stress. Researchers have found that yoga leads to lower cholesterol and weight loss, too.



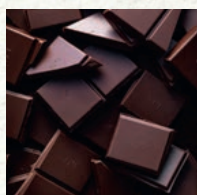
8 EAT AT LEAST ONE SERVING OF OILY FISH PER WEEK

Oily fish such as salmon, sardines and mackerel are rich in omega-3 essential fatty acids, which benefit heart health and reduce the risk of dying from heart disease. In countries where people consume a lot of fish, such as in the Mediterranean, Greenland

and Japan, fewer people have heart disease compared to those living in the UK. The NHS recommends eating at least two portions of fish each week, with one of these being an oily variety. A portion is around 140g cooked, or 170g uncooked, fish – for example, a tin and a half of sardines or an average-sized salmon fillet.



MORE TOP FOODS FOR HEART HEALTH



DARK CHOCOLATE

with 70% or more cocoa solids. Keep to 20g (about 2 squares) a day – the amount used in most studies

OILY FISH such as salmon or mackerel

PULSES including beans, lentils and peas

SOYA as edamame beans, tofu, tempeh or soya milk and yogurt alternatives

AVOCADOS instead of butter, eggs or cheese

OLIVE OIL in place of butter or dairy fat

9 WALK EVERY DAY

Aerobic exercise helps to raise HDL, the 'good' cholesterol that removes fat from the arteries, and lower LDL, the 'bad' type. Aim for 150 minutes of moderate cardiovascular activity weekly – anything from brisk walking to running. A 2022 study of 88,000 middle-aged British adults found those who walked at a brisk pace of about 100 steps per minute were at a reduced risk of heart disease compared to those who did the same number of steps more slowly.

10 REDUCE YOUR SALT INTAKE

Salt can increase your blood pressure, which in turn heightens your risk of heart disease and stroke. The daily salt intake for adults should be less than 6g. Cut down by getting out of the habit of adding salt to meals, checking food labels (a product labelled as 'low salt' should have less than 0.3g salt per 100g) and minimising salty foods such as savoury snacks, processed meats including bacon and ham, bought sauces and ready meals.

Health writer Anita Bean is a registered nutritionist specialising in sports nutrition. She has worked with the British Olympic Association and Swim England, and has written numerous books on health and diet.

For delicious recipes to help you look after your heart health, visit [waitrose.com/healthyrecipes](https://www.waitrose.com/healthyrecipes)