

Lowering your cholesterol – next steps

You will find this diet sheet useful if you have already reduced the amount of saturated fat in your diet and would like some more ideas on how to lower your cholesterol. If you have any further questions, please speak to the dietitian caring for you.

Step 1: Increase your fruit and vegetable intake

Fruits and vegetables contain fibre and antioxidants, which have been associated with lowering cholesterol levels. A balanced diet should include **at least five portions of fruit and vegetables per day**. These can be fresh, frozen, dried or canned.

A portion of fresh fruit or vegetables is roughly **80g** or **1 handful**. For dried fruit the portion size is half a handful, as the fruit will be more concentrated. To get the most benefit, aim for as many different types of fruits and vegetables as you can.

Here are some examples of fruit and vegetable portion sizes:

1 medium apple	3 heaped tablespoons of canned beans
1 medium banana	3 heaped tablespoons of frozen peas
2 satsumas	1 medium onion
half an avocado	1 bowl of lettuce
1 handful of fresh berries	

Step 2: Change to wholegrain carbohydrates

Wholegrain carbohydrates – such as those found in wholemeal (brown) bread, wholegrain cereals (eg wheat biscuits or porridge), brown rice or pasta – can help lower your 'bad cholesterol' (also known as low-density lipoprotein – LDL). This is important as too much bad cholesterol can cause fatty material to build up in your artery walls. This fatty material can make your arteries get narrower or blocked up and increases your risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

Porridge oats also contain beta-glucans, which can help reduce the absorption of bad cholesterol in your gut. Try swapping your daily bread for a wholegrain option, or start having porridge for breakfast.

Step 3: Reduce your sugar intake

A high sugar intake has been associated with increasing another type of bad cholesterol called triglycerides. Here are a few ways you can reduce your sugar intake:

- Swap high-sugar snacks such as cakes, chocolates and biscuits with lower-sugar options such as fruits or vegetables.

- If you take sugar in your tea, swap to a sweetener.
- If you like full-sugar fizzy drinks or squash try the diet or no added sugar options.
- Fruit juices can also be high in sugar, so limit your intake to just one per day or eat the fruit in its natural form instead.

Step 4: Reduce your alcohol intake

Drinking too much alcohol is associated with increased levels of triglycerides, as well as contributing to weight gain and liver problems.

The recommended levels are no more than **two to three units per day for women** and **three to four units per day for men**. It is also recommended that you have two drink-free days per week.

One unit of alcohol is the equivalent to:

- half a pint of ordinary-strength beer or cider
- one small glass of wine
- one single measure of spirit
- one small glass of sherry

Ways in which you can reduce your alcohol intake may include:

- topping up your wine or beer with a diet soft drink to make a spritzer or shandy
- using a smaller glass
- having a soft drink in between drinks
- using a phone app or written diary to keep an eye on your daily intake.

Step 5: Nuts

Nuts contain good fats, fibre, minerals and antioxidants. They are also a great snack. There is no current recommendation for which nuts are most beneficial, but for the most impact a portion size of 30g or half a handful of nuts per day is recommended. It is important to note, however, that nuts are high in calories and that consuming large amounts can contribute to weight gain.

Step 6: Try a stanol or sterol product

You may have seen cholesterol-lowering products in the supermarket. These contain plant versions of cholesterol called stanols or sterols. Consuming around 1.5–2.4g of stanols or sterols has been shown to effectively lower cholesterol levels by approximately 10%.

Each of these suggestions contain the right amount of stanols or sterols you will need in a day:

- 1 cholesterol-lowering yoghurt
- two or three glasses of a cholesterol-lowering milk (each glass 250ml)
- four to six teaspoons of cholesterol-lowering spread.

Step 7: Aim for two portions of fish per week (preferably oily types)

Oily fish contain good fats, which can help reduce your risk of heart disease. These fish include salmon, mackerel, sardines, herrings, anchovies and trout. The recommendations for a healthy heart are **two portions per week**.

Step 8: Get more active

Physical activity can help raise your good cholesterol levels. To reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease **150 minutes (two and a half hours) of moderate-intensity activity per week** is recommended. This can be split up into **5 x 30-minute sessions**. Moderate-intensity exercises include those where your heart rate is raised and you are sweating. These include jogging, cycling and aerobics. Try incorporating physical activity into your daily routine, eg cycling or walking to work or taking the stairs instead of the lift.

Step 9: Stop smoking

Smoking is the biggest risk factor for cardiovascular disease as it contributes to high blood pressure and reduces your good cholesterol levels. If you need help with stopping smoking you can contact the Trust stop smoking service on 020 7188 0995 or email gst-r.gsttstopsmokingservice@nhs.net.

Alternatively, contact your nurse, GP or pharmacist for free smoking cessation advice.

Step 10: Reduce salt

Although salt does not affect your cholesterol, high levels can increase your blood pressure, which is another risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

Foods that are high in salt include:

- processed, smoked or cured meats and fish
- cheese
- crisps
- processed meals eg ready meals.

The recommended intake of salt is less than 6g per day. This is the same as around **one teaspoon of salt per day**.

The best way to avoid a high salt intake is to prepare foods from scratch. This way you can control the amount of salt in your food. Make sure you always taste your foods before adding extra salt. If you are not able to prepare meals from scratch, choose reduced-salt options of ready meals and avoid adding salt to foods at the table. You can also use herbs and spices to improve the flavour of your foods.

Useful sources of information

British Heart Foundation

Charity that funds research, education, care and awareness campaigns aimed to prevent heart disease. Provides information and resources on cardiovascular health.

t: 0300 330 3322

e: supporterservices@bhf.org.uk

w: www.bhf.org.uk

NHS Choices – Healthy hearts

Webpages containing information about how to maintain a healthy heart.

w: www.nhs.uk/livewell/healthyhearts

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the nutrition and dietetics department on **020 7188 2010** or **020 7188 4128** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm). If we are unable to take your call, please leave us a message and we will call you back.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

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t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

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