

Healthy Eating Advice - Raised Blood Cholesterol

Some simple changes to your diet may help you to reduce your cholesterol levels to within recommended limits (and reduce the chances of you developing heart disease).

The food you eat contains several types of fat:

Cholesterol – some foods (such as eggs) contain cholesterol, but this dietary cholesterol has little effect on blood cholesterol levels. To reduce your blood cholesterol levels you should reduce the amount of saturated fats that you eat.

Saturated fats - these raise your blood cholesterol, so intake should be reduced. These are mainly found in animal products e.g. dairy foods such as whole milk, cream, butter and cheese; in fatty meats and meat-based products such as sausages; and in pastry, cakes and biscuits.

Monounsaturated fats – these help to lower your blood cholesterol levels so you should increase the amount that you eat – the most commonly available source is olive oil which you can use for cooking or as a salad dressing and is also available as a spread. However rapeseed and peanut oils are also high in monounsaturated fats.

Polyunsaturated fats – are found in oily fish and plant based foods - these also help to reduce blood cholesterol levels and should be chosen in preference to saturated fats. Oily fish is a particularly good source but sunflower cooking oils and spreads are also high in polyunsaturates, as are soya-based products.

Some easy ways to help lower your cholesterol levels:-

1. Choosing a margarine / spread which is high in mono- or polyunsaturates.
2. Switch to low fat dairy products such as skimmed or semi-skimmed milk and choose edam, brie, etc, rather than a cheddar-type cheese.
3. Reduce the amount of red meat and meat-based products that you eat – choose chicken or fish more often.
4. Do not fry foods, try grilling, boiling, baking, etc, instead.
5. Eat more fruit, vegetables, pulses (peas, beans, lentils) and wholemeal varieties of products such as pasta and bread.
6. Eat more oat-based products such as porridge.

Oily fish and omega-3

Oily fish e.g. herring, tuna, salmon, mackerel, kippers, trout, sardines and pilchards can help reduce your risk of heart disease because they contain a particularly helpful type of polyunsaturated fat called omega-3 fatty acid. Most people should try to eat oily fish once a week. If you do not like to eat fish other sources are available e.g. dark green leafy vegetable, some nuts (almonds, walnuts, pecan nuts, peanuts) and soya beans.

Cholesterol-lowering products

There are products available (such as yoghurts and spreads) which can help to reduce blood cholesterol levels if used as recommended. However, these can be expensive and are not a replacement for dietary changes (and any prescribed medications).