



# South Asian diet and cholesterol

**Cholesterol is a blood fat - it is vital for health. However too much cholesterol over time can cause arteries to narrow and become blocked. This narrowing is what causes angina or a heart attack.**

Development of Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) is influenced by the number of risk factors a person has.

CHD is more likely:

- With increasing age
- If there is a strong family history of CHD
- In people of South Asian origin

These risk factors cannot be changed. But there are others that can be modified by leading a healthy lifestyle. These include:

- Raised blood cholesterol
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Smoking
- Physical inactivity

A healthy diet is important in preventing or managing these risk factors. You don't have to give up your traditional foods... just small changes can make a big difference.

Many of the traditional South Asian foods are healthy, however, the way that the dishes are prepared is very important.

## Lowering cholesterol – the best approach

**A combination of cholesterol lowering foods alongside a low saturated fat diet is recommended.** Current guidelines recommend no more than 30g of saturated fat for men and no more than 20g for women per day.

## Eating less saturated fat

- Avoid using ghee, butter or coconut oil in cooking. Did you know that there are 10g of saturated fat in just one tablespoon of ghee? Vegetable ghee is often high in harmful trans fats so replace it with smaller amounts of healthier unsaturated fats such as rapeseed (usually sold as pure vegetable oil), olive, sunflower or corn oil.
- Avoid adding ghee or butter to your chapatti dough and in your cooked dhal and also avoid spreading fat on cooked chapatis.
- Oil used for deep frying should not be re-used as some of the unsaturated fat can become saturated when reheated.
- Avoid fatty meat and processed meat products such as sausages, salami, pies, pasties and canned meat. Trim visible fat from meat before cooking. Mutton and lamb can be very high in saturated fat, so have poultry or fish more often and replace meat with beans, pulses or soya mince instead. There is no need to add oil when cooking meat or mince, just brown the meat in a non-stick pan and add the spices, tomatoes and onions as normal. Skim off any oil that settles on top of the curry.
- Choose lower fat dairy products such as semi-skimmed, 1% fat or skimmed milk or try a plant based alternative such as soya alternative to milk and yogurt, almond or oat drink. You can still make your own yogurt using low fat milk. For a creamier taste add a tablespoon of dried skimmed milk powder to every pint of milk. Avoid adding boondhi to yogurt. Try pomegranate or grated cucumber and spices to taste.
- Substitute high fat cheeses such as cream cheese, cheddar type cheeses, fried paneer with low fat and reduced fat cheeses. Best choices include cottage, quark, half fat Edam and "extra light" cheese spread.
- Indian sweets like burfi, halwa, gulab jamuns etc are tasty but are usually made with ingredients like butter, ghee, condensed and full cream milk. Save them for special occasions only.
- Cakes, biscuits, pastries, burgers, pizzas and fast foods can be high in unhealthy fats so only eat them occasionally.

## To cut down on fat generally

All types of fat contain the same amount of calories so switching from one type to another will not help you lose weight. Only reducing the amount of fat you eat can do that.

- Eat fewer fried foods such as samosas, pakoras, chevda (Bombay mix). Brush samosas or kachoris with oil and bake in the oven till crisp. Drop spoonfuls of the pakoras mixture onto a lightly greased non-stick frying pan. Cook on each side until browned. They will form small, thinner, pakoras than usual but they taste just as good
- Whenever possible microwave, steam, poach, bake, boil or grill instead of frying. If you use oil in making curries, measure using a spoon instead of pouring from the container. Limit to 1 teaspoon per person. Add water or tinned tomatoes to prevent food sticking to the pan. Double the amount of onions you use for sauces to increase the moisture content.
- Instead of using fried ingredients make chevda by using roasted shelled peanuts, lower fat crisps, rice krispies or cornflakes, roasted chick peas and spices
- Grill or microwave poppadums instead of frying
- Be aware that some vegetables (methi - fenugreek, aubergines, keralas) absorb more oil than others. Partially replace some oil with small amounts of water when cooking these
- Choose baked/grilled fish instead of fatty meat. A delicious masala fish can be made by marinating your favourite fish with spices and tomatoes and baking it in the oven. Add lemon juice and garlic to help reduce the "fishy" odour in the house!

## Omega 3 rich foods

- Aim for 1-2 servings of oil rich fish per week
- Canned fish is convenient and cheap, frozen fish can be as nutritious as fresh. You can add traditional spices to suit your taste buds!

If you are a vegetarian:

- ✓ Choose rapeseed oil for food preparation and salad dressings
- ✓ Eat walnuts as a snack or add to a salad
- ✓ Grind linseeds (ailsi/flaxseeds) and add to atta, cook in porridge, sprinkle on dhals and salads
- ✓ Eat a variety of dark green vegetables/salad leaves (spinach, rocket...)
- ✓ Add soya beans to curries or make soya keema

Remember all kinds of fats are a concentrated source of calories so if trying to lose weight keep to small amounts.

## To increase fibre

- Aim for at least one portion of dhal/beans/soya daily. You can also add dhals and vegetables to your meat dishes to increase the soluble fibre of the dish
- Choose coarse wholemeal atta for chapatis, or try a combination of wholemeal and white mixed together in your atta container. Bhajra (millet) roti is a good source of fibre as is besan (gram flour). Soya flour can be mixed with your regular chapati atta to boost fibre. Methi (fenugreek) can also be added to your atta mix

- Try brown rice. It takes slightly longer to cook but is equally tasty.
- Choose oat bread, rye bread, wholemeal, granary and seeded breads
- Aim for 2-3 portions of oat based foods daily (50:50 oat rich bread, oat rich breakfast cereals, oat cake biscuits, oat bran). Alternatively you can add 2 tablespoons of oatbran to other wholegrain cereals
- Replace sugary cereals with the wholegrain varieties
- Have a handful of unsalted nuts like walnuts, almonds, peanuts, pistachios and pecans daily
- Aim for at least 5 portions of fruits and vegetables daily. If oil is used in cooking keep this to a minimum.

Potatoes are not counted as a vegetable portion

## Stanol/sterol enriched foods

Consuming 2g per day of plant sterols/stanols can help reduce levels of LDL-cholesterol. These are added to some spreads, yogurts, milk and mini-drinks. For best effects eat these fortified foods at mealtimes.

2g is usually achieved by consuming three portions of a fortified food:

**1 portion** = either 2 teaspoons of spread, 1 yogurt  
or 1 glass milk

**1 mini yogurt drink** = 3 portions

## A word about alcohol...

Until recently we thought that there might be some small benefit for your heart from having the occasional drink. But recent thinking has changed. Experts now advise that both men and women should drink no more than 14 units per week.

**1 unit** = half a pint of beer/lager  
1 pub measure of spirits  
½ small glass of wine

Drinking more than this or "binge drinking" can put your health at risk. High alcohol use is linked to raised blood pressure, stroke, heart and liver disease. And remember although alcohol contains no fat, it is high in calories.

## Be more active

For good health and to help boost the good cholesterol (HDL) aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity on at least five days of the week.

Find an activity you enjoy. Some swimming pools and leisure centres offer women-only classes. Bhangra and raas-garba are great ways to keep fit whilst having fun!

For more information on all aspects of cholesterol management please go to [www.heartuk.org.uk](http://www.heartuk.org.uk). You can also email any queries to [ask@heartuk.org.uk](mailto:ask@heartuk.org.uk) or call HEART UK helpline **0345 450 5988** Monday to Friday, 10-3 pm.

Should you wish to speak to a dietetic advisor in Hindi, Urdu or Punjabi, you can call the helpline on Tuesdays between 10am and 3pm.