



South Asian diet and cholesterol

Cholesterol 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. Dhal, pulses, meat and vegetable curries served with rice or chapati, low fat yoghurt and salad are high in fibre and can be low in fat. 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 or creamed coconut in cooking. Did you know that there are 10 grams of saturated fat in just one tablespoon of ghee? Vegetable ghee is often rich in harmful trans fat so choose oils made from rapeseed, olive, corn or sunflower instead
- Oil used for deep frying should not be re-used as some of the unsaturated fats become saturated fats on reheating
- Avoid adding ghee or butter to your chapati dough and also avoid spreading fat on cooked chapatis
- Invest in a good quality non-stick frying pan and use to start your "turka" or "vagar". Measure the oil with a spoon instead of pouring it
- Trim visible fat from meat before cooking. Brown meat in a non-stick pan, drain excess fat and then add the "turka". Mutton and lamb can be high in saturated fat, so use lean cuts. Skim off any oil that settles on top of the curry
- Choose lower fat dairy products such as skimmed, 1% or semi-skimmed milk. If you find the taste a bit light add a tablespoon of dried skimmed milk powder to every pint of milk. Avoid adding boondhi to yoghurt. Try pomegranate or grated cucumber and spices to taste
- Substitute Soya milk/soya yoghurts for cows milk/yoghurts
- Mithai, like burfi, halva, gulab jamuns etc. may be tasty, but are usually made with ingredients like butter, ghee, condensed milk and full cream milk powder. Save mithai for special occasions
- Cakes, biscuits, pies, burgers, pizzas, fast foods and pastries can be high in unhealthy fats so only eat them occasionally

Replace saturated fats with healthier unsaturated fats such as pure vegetable oil (usually rapeseed), olive oil, sunflower oil, corn oil.

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 cut down on fat generally

- 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
- 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 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!

To increase Fibre

- Aim for at least one portion of dhal/beans/soya daily. You can also add dhals 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 (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, yoghurts, 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 yoghurt
or 1 glass milk

1 mini yoghurt drink = 3 portions

A word about alcohol...

Moderate alcohol use has been shown to protect against CHD in men and women over 50. But experts recommend a maximum weekly intake of 21 units for men and 14 units for women.

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.

Smoking

Cigarette smoking, even a few a day, increases the risk of heart disease. Smoking lowers the good cholesterol (HDL) and increases the chance of clots forming in narrowed arteries, leading to a heart attack.

It's never too late to stop. The benefit to your heart is rapid and helps, no matter what your age.

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. You can also email any queries to ask@heartuk.org.uk or call HEART UK helpline **0845 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 Fridays between 10am and 3pm.