



Eating for a healthy heart: vegetarians

A good diet, rich in fruit, vegetables, wholegrain cereals and low in saturated fat and salt is a key part of managing raised cholesterol. Whilst vegetarian diets are generally thought to be healthy, care should be taken to ensure that there is an adequate intake of key nutrients (protein, iron and calcium) and those foods high in fat are eaten in moderation.

1. **Be a healthy weight** for your height. A good guide is your waist measurement which should be measured at the widest point. Ideally it should be less than 94cm (37 inches) in men and less than 80cm (32 inches) in women.
2. **Avoid saturated fats** found in butter, ghee, full fat dairy foods and coconut oil. Replace these with fats high in monounsaturated fatty acids found in olive oil and rapeseed oil or fats high in polyunsaturates found in sunflower oil, corn oil and soya oil.
3. **Include a variety of pulses** (dahls (lentils), peas, beans), nuts, seeds, soya and other vegetable proteins during the day.
4. Remember **vegetarian convenience foods** can be quite high in fat. Always check the label. A lot of fat is 20g or more per 100g. A lot of saturated fat is 5g or more per 100g.
5. **Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables** – at least 5 portions a day. A portion is: 1 glass of fruit juice, a dessert-bowl of salad, a medium sized fruit, 2 tablespoons raw, cooked, canned or frozen vegetables. Cook vegetables lightly in a minimum of water to retain the nutrients.
6. Make **starchy foods** like cereals, pasta, rice, chapattis, potatoes, noodles and bread the basis of most meals. Try to include wholemeal or wholegrain varieties.
7. Have 2-3 portions of the **low fat dairy foods** per day. If avoiding dairy foods, choose calcium fortified soya products.
8. Oily fish is the best source of the long chain **Omega 3 fats** which can help lower triglycerides and improve circulation.

However plant based foods especially dark green leafy vegetables and cereal products also contain **Omega 3 fats** (of the shorter chain variety) but other sources are nuts and soya products such as tofu, soyabeans.
 - To maximise the Omega 3 fats from vegetarian sources, eat as little fat or oil as possible except for rapeseed oil (use in cooking or as a salad dressing) or other oils like soya oil, walnut oil, flax seed oil and linseed oil.
 - You could take one teaspoon of flaxseed oil a day, either taken on its own or mixed into dressings. Flaxseed oil is also available in vegetable capsules.
9. Restrict your **salt intake**. Reducing the amount of salt that you eat will help lower your blood pressure. As much as three quarters of salt comes from processed foods so check out those labels. Some products label salt, others label sodium. As a guide:
 - **A lot of salt is 1.5g salt or more per 100g (0.6g sodium or more per 100g).**
 - **A little salt 0.3g salt or less per 100g (0.1g sodium or less per 100g)**
 You can convert sodium to salt by multiplying by 2.5.
10. Enjoy **alcohol** with food but keep to **sensible limits**. Try to limit to no more than 2-3 units each day. A unit is a half-pint of normal strength beer, lager or cider or a pub measure of sherry or spirits. A typical pub measure of wine is now around 2 units.
11. Although having a healthy diet is a central part of reducing cholesterol levels, it is only one aspect of living a **healthy lifestyle**. Changing diet, losing weight, being more active and stopping smoking should all contribute to lowering your cholesterol levels. For some people it may be necessary to use medication to further reduce cholesterol to acceptable limits.