



Afro-Caribbean 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.

The 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

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

- Raised blood cholesterol
- Smoking
- Physical inactivity

Also, if you are of African Caribbean descent you are more likely to experience

- High blood pressure
- Stroke
- Type 2 diabetes.

A healthy diet and lifestyle is important in helping to prevent or manage these risk factors. Many staple foods in the Caribbean and African diet are good for health. From leafy green vegetables to fresh mango, to beans, there are lots of nutrient rich choices. However traditional foods which are fried or have high levels of salt and fat should be limited.

You don't have to give up your traditional foods...by making small changes to the way you prepare and cook and by watching your portion sizes, you can still enjoy the taste of the Caribbean as part of a healthy lifestyle.

Lowering cholesterol – the best approach

A mixture of cholesterol lowering foods and a healthy low saturated fat diet are recommended. Current guidelines recommend no more than 30g of saturated fat for men and no more than 20g for women per day. Remember all kinds of fats are a concentrated source of calories, so if trying to lose weight keep to small amounts.

Eating less saturated fat

- Avoid using butter, coconut oil, coconut milk, coconut cream, palm oil or lard in cooking. Did you know there are 10 grams of saturated fat in just 4 teaspoons of butter? Choose oils made from rapeseed, olive, corn or sunflower instead, or a spread made from these
- Although it is better to use oil in cooking it is still important to limit the amount especially in traditional dishes. Jerk chicken, beef jerky, corn and pineapple fritters and plantain all tend to be fried. Best to steam, boil, poach, grill, bake and casserole foods. See our factsheet on **Cooking with Less Fat**
- Avoid adding butter or oil to dishes once they are cooked
- Use the leanest cuts of meat possible and trim any visible fat/skin before cooking. For example if cooking goat meat, remove any visible fat and cut into bite sized chunks. If using meat on the bone, remove any visible fat, but leave the meat on the bone. Skim off any fat that settles on top of stews, curries and one-pot meals
- Limit high fat cuts of meat such as chicken wings, spare ribs, chicken/cow/pig feet, cow tongue, pig/ox tail
- Avoid fatty meats and meat products such as sausages, pâté, bacon, salami. Just 2 sausages can provide 10g saturated fat – half a woman's maximum daily saturated fat allowance
- Choose lower fat dairy products such as skimmed, 1% or semi-skimmed milk instead of full cream milk, condensed or evaporated milk
- Try substituting low fat yoghurt, fromage frais or crème fraîche in recipes that call for cream

- Avoid using high fat cheeses. If you do occasionally use cheese in a recipe use small quantities of a stronger cheese or opt for a lower fat variety
- Replace creamy salad dressings with those made from plain low-fat yoghurt, heart healthy oils or low calorie/low fat ones
- Cut back on fried snack foods such as plantain chips, madazi, puff puff and dumplings. Pastries, tarts and other baked cakes and puddings should also be limited

Omega 3 rich foods

- Aim for 2 servings of fish* per week, at least one of these should be oily
- Canned fish is convenient and cheap, frozen fish can be as nutritious as fresh. See our factsheet on **Fish**

*Salt fish is very high in salt. Eating too much salt may cause high blood pressure in some people. For those who already have high blood pressure cutting down on salt intake is very important. Try to use salt fish less often. If you do cook with salt fish then soak it for as long as possible to remove excess salt.

Eating less salt – try to limit

- Salt fish, corned beef, bacon, salt pork and processed meats
- Salty snack foods such as crisps and salted nuts
- Use as little salt in cooking as possible
- Experiment with herbs and spices to add flavour to your food
- Cut down on the number of times you choose salted, pickled, smoked and processed foods each week

See our factsheet on **Salt**.

To increase fibre

- Aim for at least one portion of beans or lentils each day. Like most pulses, beans such as pigeon peas, red peas (kidney beans), and black eyed peas are ideal for adding to soups, stews and curries. Red peas are great in salads. Black eyed peas work well with rice.
- Aim for at least 5 portions of fruits and vegetables daily. Vegetables such as okra, aubergines, leafy greens, callaloo, kale and spinach are excellent sources of soluble fibre. Try grilling aubergine on the barbecue or dry roast it in the oven for a healthy side dish. Like okra it can also be diced and added to curries and stews.
- 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 (oat rich bread, oat rich breakfast cereals, oat cake biscuits, oat bran). Alternatively you can add 2 tablespoons of oat bran to other wholegrain cereals, soups, casseroles, yoghurts and smoothies
- Replace sugary cereals with wholegrain varieties
- Have a handful of unsalted nuts like walnuts, almonds, peanuts, pistachios and pecans daily
- Starchy foods such as maize, cassava, yam, green banana and plantain are also good sources of fibre

Stanol/sterol enriched foods

Consuming between 2 and 2.4g per day of plant sterols/stanols can help reduce levels of LDL-cholesterol by 10%. 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

3 portions = 1 mini-yoghurt drink

See our fact sheet on **Plant Sterols**.

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 ordinary strength beer/lager
1 pub measure of spirits
½ small glass of red 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.

See our fact sheet on **Alcohol**.

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 is 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 most days of the week. See our fact sheet on **Physical Activity**.

For more information on all aspects of cholesterol management go to our website www.heartuk.org.uk. You can also email any queries to ask@heartuk.org.uk or call the HEARTUK helpline **0345 450 5988**, Monday to Friday between 10am and 3 pm.