

Dietary Support for Cardiovascular Health

Our cardiovascular health often declines as we get older but the damage is done decades earlier. With an increasing awareness about the role of diet and life-style on our cardiovascular health, death rates from Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) have fallen significantly in people aged under 65 years in the last 10 years. Women, in particular, need to be mindful that rates of high blood pressure, a major risk factor for heart disease, increase significantly after the onset of menopause.

Below are some recommendations to support your cardiovascular health whatever age:

- Boost your intake of fruit, vegetables, beans and lentils; they contain **soluble fibre** which can help to lower cholesterol levels.
- Have 2 heaped dessertspoons of **oat bran** and / or **ground flaxseeds** every day as they reduce cholesterol and normalise blood pressure — add to porridge, muesli and smoothies or even savoury dishes like Bolognese, stew, and curries.
- Adding 2–3 heaped teaspoons of **lecithin** to meals helps to bind to cholesterol in the gut to aid its excretion from the body.
- Cook with **turmeric** and **cinnamon** - these spices contain compounds that positively affect the ‘bad’ LDL cholesterol levels and high blood pressure.
- Avoid processed foods and added salt — table salt and the high levels of salt used in processed food can contribute to high blood pressure.
- Increase consumption of **garlic, onions, broccoli, cabbage** and **Brussels sprouts** - the sulphur found in these foods is used by the gut bacteria to make hydrogen sulphide, which can relax blood vessel walls helping to lower blood pressure.
- Aim to eat **celery** every day. It is high in potassium which helps to lower blood pressure. Celery also contains unique compounds that help to dilate the blood vessels and thin the blood, of benefit to individuals with high blood pressure.
- Eat more **asparagus**, it has a natural diuretic effect which can help to lower blood pressure.
- Avoid red meat, dairy and fried foods to minimise your intake of saturated fats.
- Eat oily fish at least three times a week and include a small handful of nuts or seeds daily to boost your levels of beneficial essential fatty acids. **Omega-3 and 6 fats** help to lower blood pressure and raise the ‘good’ HDL cholesterol levels.
- Increase your consumption of **vitamin E**-rich foods to improve your balance of HDL:LDL ratio. For example, eat oily fish, nuts and seeds, green vegetables and avocados.



- **Vitamin C** is an important antioxidant in protecting the cardiovascular system. Food sources include strawberries, dark-coloured berries, kiwi fruit, peppers, watercress, broccoli, cauliflower, tomatoes, parsley, apples and papaya.
- Increase your daily intake of whole grains (e.g., rye and millet) and green leafy vegetables to ensure you are having enough **vitamin B3**. This vitamin has beneficial effects on cholesterol levels.
- Swap builder's tea and coffee for **Green tea**. It's lower in caffeine (which raises blood pressure) and rich in health-supporting antioxidants.
- Limit alcohol to the occasional glass of good quality organic red wine to avoid over-burdening your liver. Your liver is responsible for breaking down cholesterol to maintain optimal levels.
- Cigarette smoke contains chemicals which can raise blood pressure and oxidise cholesterol, increasing the chance of forming arterial plaques. It is important to quit smoking.

Other considerations:

- Decrease BMI if overweight or obese
- Increase daily activity to 30 minutes or vigorous exercise per day at least 5 times per week
- Good oral hygiene to prevent periodontal disease

To discuss your particular circumstances and concerns and to explore how to improve your cardio vascular health, contact hello@eatforlife.co.uk.