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Diet and exercise advice for adult patients with established heart disease, living with overweight or obesity

Advice, ideas and tools to help support your journey

This is not a real patient and is for illustrative purposes only.

This patient leaflet is for patients who are overweight or living with a diagnosis of obesity and with established heart disease in the United Kingdom. This patient leaflet is not a substitute for clinical advice provided by your healthcare professional.

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Balanced diet

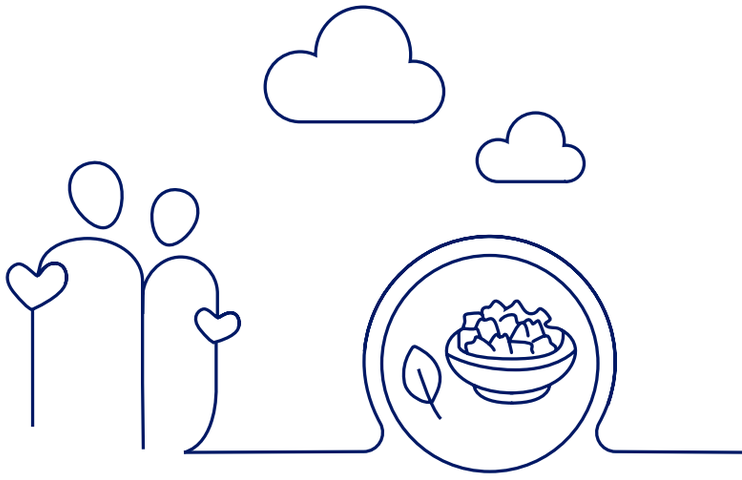
Exercise

How this guide can help

A healthy heart is essential for an active life, yet many of us have experienced, or are at risk of, conditions that can lead to serious events such as heart attack and stroke.

Understanding and managing these risks is crucial for maintaining your health.

This guide will give you helpful information about a balanced diet and tips for being more active.



Healthy eating for your cardiovascular system

What experts recommend

Eating a healthy diet has many health benefits including reducing your risk of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and coronary heart disease.

The British Heart Foundation recommends emphasising the following foods in your diet:

1. A variety of fruits and vegetables
2. Wholegrains
3. Beans and pulses
4. Low-fat dairy products
5. Skinless poultry and fish
6. Nuts and seeds

You should try to limit consumption of the following foods:

1. Salt (sodium)
2. Red and processed meat
3. Sugary foods
4. Sweets
5. Sugar-sweetened beverages
6. Alcohol

Preparing healthy food

Fruit and vegetables

- Fruit and vegetables should make up just over a third of the food you eat; aiming for at least 5 portions every day
- Fruit and vegetables can be fresh, frozen, dried, juiced or tinned (in juice or water with no added salt or sugar)
- Try to avoid adding high-calorie sauces or butter to your vegetables and sugar or syrups to fruit

Protein

- Choose lean meats such as poultry (without the skin), fish, or vegetable proteins such as beans and pulses, and prepare by grilling, baking or steaming rather than frying
- Try to eat fish at least twice a week, including one oily fish such as salmon, sardines or mackerel as these contain omega-3 oils
- Where possible, swap whole milk for semi skimmed milk or 1 per cent fat milk and choose low or reduced fat versions of cheese and yogurts

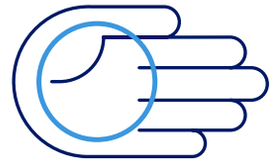
Carbohydrates

- Choose fibre-rich wholegrains for carbohydrate options, such as wholegrain pasta, brown rice, and new potatoes (with skins on)
- As well as bread, rice, pasta and potatoes, this food group includes oats, chapattis, naan, yam, plantain and couscous

Salt

- Choose foods that are low in salt (sodium)
- Try not to add salt when you are cooking or at the table – use herbs or spices to add flavour instead
- Having too much salt in your diet can increase the risk of high blood pressure

The secret to portion size is in your hands!



Simple ways to choose heart healthy portions

One way to work out portion sizes is to simply use your hand. This is a great way to get a quick idea of how much food you are eating.

The British Heart foundation recommends 5+ portions of fruit and/or vegetables per day, 2-3 portions of meats and other protein sources, and 3 portions of low-fat dairy products.

A portion of chicken or fish is the size of your hand

A portion of cooked meat and beans is like the palm of your hand, or about the size of a deck of cards

A portion of fruit should be the size of one palm, with vegetables equating to two palms

A portion of carbohydrates is like the size of your fist

A portion of cheese is the size of your middle and index fingers together

An alternative way to manage your food portions is the plate model.

Simply imagine your plate is divided into three sections and add food types accordingly. Aim to portion your plate with: ½ with non-starchy vegetables, ¼ with healthy carbohydrates, and ¼ with healthy proteins.

Eat as many different vegetables as possible, aiming for 5+ portions per day

Choose as many different colour fruits as possible

Reduce saturated fats such as butter, ghee and lard and trans fats often found in fried foods, biscuits and pastries

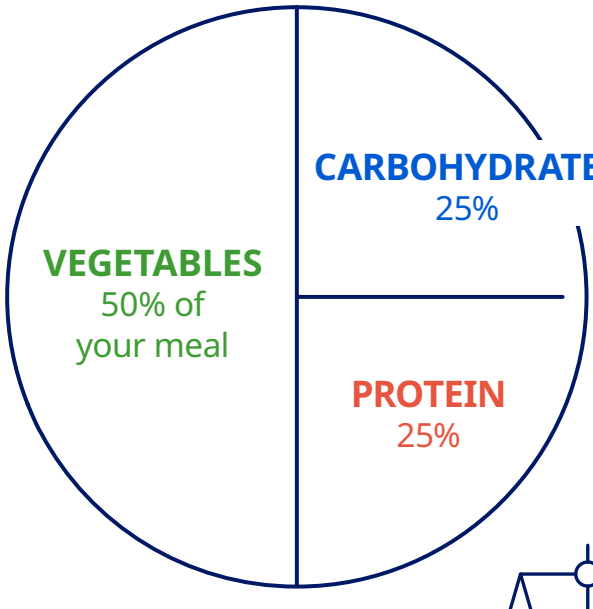
When using oils and spreads, choose more olive or rapeseed-based products

Swap processed carbohydrates such as white breads and pastas for brown or wholegrain alternatives to help increase fibre intake

Choose lean meats like fish and poultry. Limit the amount of full-fat cheese and fatty meat cuts. Avoid processed meats

Make water your drink of choice – or tea/coffee with little or no sugar and lower fat milk; these and sugar-free drinks all count towards your daily goal of 6-8 cups a day.

The healthy weight plate



How to read food labels

Understanding the information on a food label can help you to make better decisions about which products to choose. This way, you can choose food products that promote cardiovascular health.

Food labels can seem confusing or complicated at first glance; however they contain key information to help you make good choices for your heart health.

Although food labels may look very different, they all contain the following:

- Name of the food
- List of ingredients
- Net quantity information – largest ingredient to smallest ingredient listed in order
- Use by or best before dates
- Where the food comes from
- Special storage instructions
- Instructions for use
- Name and address of the manufacturer, packer or seller (EU labels only)
- Alcoholic strength of beverages

How to read food labels

1. Always check the serving size!

- Quantities of ingredients are often given per serving or per 100 g.
- Always pay attention to the serving size – in particular how many servings there are in the packet.
- How many servings are you eating?

2. Check the calories

- Food labels often give calories in both kilocalories (kcal) and kilojoules (kJ).
- One kcal is commonly referred to as “a calorie”.
- A snack should be about 100 calories, lunch and evening meals should be 400-600 calories.

1 kcal = 4.2 kJ

3. Ingredient lists

- Ingredients lists do not show the exact amount of any ingredient. They list ingredients in the food from largest to smallest.
- Focus on the top three ingredients as these will be present in the greatest quantities, and choose items that are lower in fat, sugar or salt wherever possible.
  - You should aim to reduce saturated fat to be less than 10% of total calories: i.e. 22 grams of fat or less for someone eating 2000 calories a day.
  - Try to limit yourself to 6 g of salt per day.
- Watch out for ingredients such as corn syrup, fruit juice concentrate, maltose, dextrose and sucrose – these are all added sugars.

4. Ingredient quantities

Limit the following:
Total fats
Saturated fat
Sugar
Salt

(look at the traffic light system for more **greens/ambers**, fewer **reds for these ingredients** and scan for added sugars)

Make sure you eat enough
Fibre
Vitamin A
Vitamin C
Calcium
Iron

5. Nutritional claims

- Some labels or food packaging include extra nutritional claims, such as 'low fat', 'reduced salt', or 'high fibre'. Although these can only be used if the food meets certain legal criteria, they should not be used as a standard for healthy food choices.

“Low fat”
“Reduced salt”
“High fibre”

- Always check the ingredients and use the traffic light system to help guide you. For example a food claiming to be “low fat” may contain added sugar or salt.

How calories add up

Use these tips to find healthy alternatives to high-calorie foods

Eating healthier foods could help to improve your heart health and reduce the risk factors for cardiovascular diseases.

Many foods can be swapped for healthier options. Consider choosing the heart-healthy options shown below:

Food	Example replacements
Shop-bought dressings	Olive oil and balsamic/ wine vinegar
Yoghurt	Low fat or natural yoghurts with no added sugar
Cream or cheese based dips	Salsa
Fizzy drinks or full sugar drinks	Sugar free (zero) alternatives or water
Porridge with honey	Replace honey with fresh fruit
Crisps	Unsalted nuts
Beer and wine	Replace large measures with smaller ones or low-alcohol alternatives
White rice	Brown rice

Food	Example replacements
White pasta	Whole-wheat pasta
Sugary cereal	Low sugar cereal with added fresh fruit
Ketchup and brown sauce	Reduced-salt and reduced-sugar versions
Fatty or processed meats	Lean meats (e.g. chicken, turkey or fish) – grilled, baked or steamed
Caffe latte	Latte with skimmed milk or black coffee, no sugar
Hot chocolate with whipped cream	Hot chocolate with skimmed milk, no cream
White bread	Wholegrain breads
Fried eggs	Boiled or poached eggs

How to help reduce overeating

Simple changes to your eating habits can improve your heart health, but you will find situations where you’re tempted to overeat.

There are often situations and/or feelings that trigger our desire to eat certain foods; often those higher in fat and/or sugars. Being able to identify and understand your eating triggers can help you to respond to them differently, making healthier choices or by distracting yourself with something else helping us to reduce overeating.

Try thinking about the following questions to identify what triggers you to break your healthy eating habits:

WHO: Are you likely to overindulge when you're with certain people?

WHEN: Are there certain times of day you're more likely to reach for an unhealthy snack?

WHERE: Are there places both inside and outside the house that you associate with consuming unhealthy food?

WHAT: Are there certain situations or moods where you're less likely to eat healthy foods?

When you approach a situation where you feel you are likely to overeat, think about ways to manage the desire for unhealthy food. If you can resist the initial urge to eat, and focus on something else such as going for a walk or having a non-alcoholic drink, your urge should start to decrease after about 10–20 minutes.

The support of your friends and family can really help. Let them know why you're making changes to your diet and lifestyle, and ask them to support you in your healthy food choices.

Tips and tricks for sticking to your healthy lifestyle habits

During a meal

- Eat slowly, take the time to enjoy the taste of your food.
- Try putting down your knife and fork between mouthfuls to help slow down your eating.
- Focus on the food being eaten and chew the food fully.
- Plan ahead for the meals that you are going to need for the week. Try to have three balanced meals evenly spaced throughout the day.
- Have healthy snacks available (such as vegetable sticks, fruit or yogurt) in case you get hungry between meals.

At a restaurant

- Try to read the menu in advance. Choose the best option for you and stick to it!
- Choose grilled, boiled or baked dishes over pan-fried and deep-fried foods. Boiling, baking, steaming, poaching and grilling seafood, skinless poultry, lean meat and vegetables are all healthy options.
- Try to avoid appetiser trays of bread, and ask for poppadoms to be grilled or microwaved.

At social events

- Consider having a healthy snack before going to a social event to stop you eating too much once you're there.
- Physically distance yourself from a buffet to reduce the temptation to graze when you're not hungry.
- Try not to drink too much alcohol. Alcohol can stimulate the appetite making you more hungry. It can also make it more difficult to stick to your other healthy habits.

At a buffet

- Offer to bring something to the buffet such as fruit salad or vegetable sticks and salsa.
- Take your time to look at the full selection of food before choosing. That way you can choose healthier options.
- Pick plenty of salads or vegetables, but avoid creamy salad dressings or vegetables cooked with butter or oil.
- Lean meat, chicken and seafood are all excellent sources of heart-friendly protein, particularly if they have been grilled or baked.

- See if you can swap less healthy food for better options, e.g. having salad, vegetables or a jacket potato instead of chips.
- Try to limit your alcohol and alternate alcoholic drinks with water or low-calorie soft drinks.

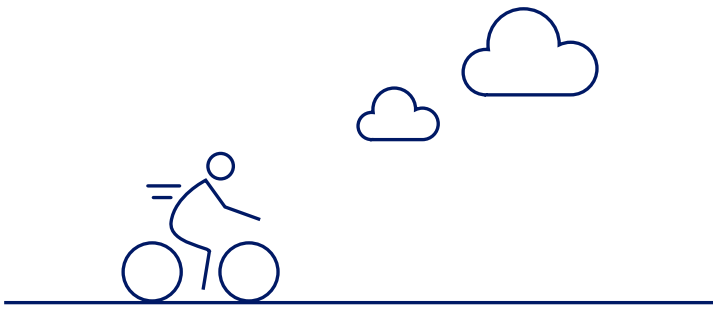
- Choose water over juice or soft drinks, which contain extra sugar calories without filling you up.
- Eat slowly, and don't feel pressured to keep returning to the buffet!

Let's move more!

Benefits of physical activity for cardiovascular health

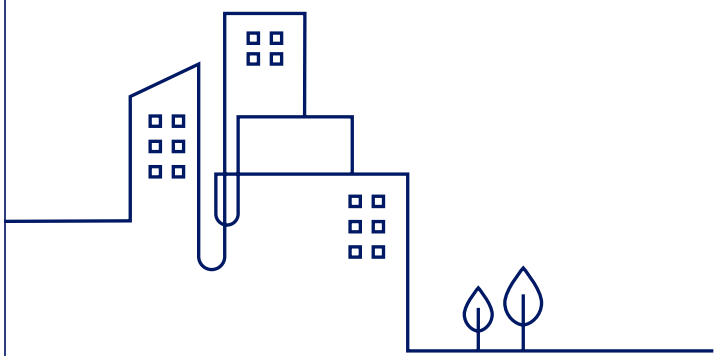
Physical activity is important for many different reasons. It can reduce the risk of future cardiovascular diseases, make you feel better, and help improve your heart health.

Please check with your healthcare professional about whether these suggested exercises are appropriate for you.



Physical activity:

- Reduces the risk of future cardiovascular problems, type 2 diabetes and other diseases
- Lowers high blood pressure
- Lowers the levels of fats in your blood
- Improves your sleep, digestion, mood and overall wellbeing
- Helps you build muscle mass

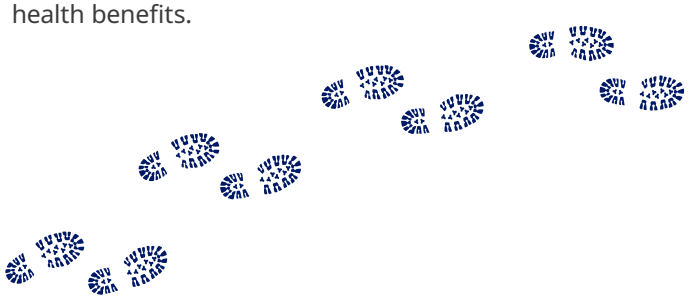


Every time you move, you are doing physical activity. Even small daily activities count, for example:

- Shopping
- Gardening
- Walking the dog
- Cleaning your home

Remember, every activity that gets you moving counts, and a little improvement goes a long way.

Even reducing the amount of time you spend sitting still or being physically inactive will provide health benefits.

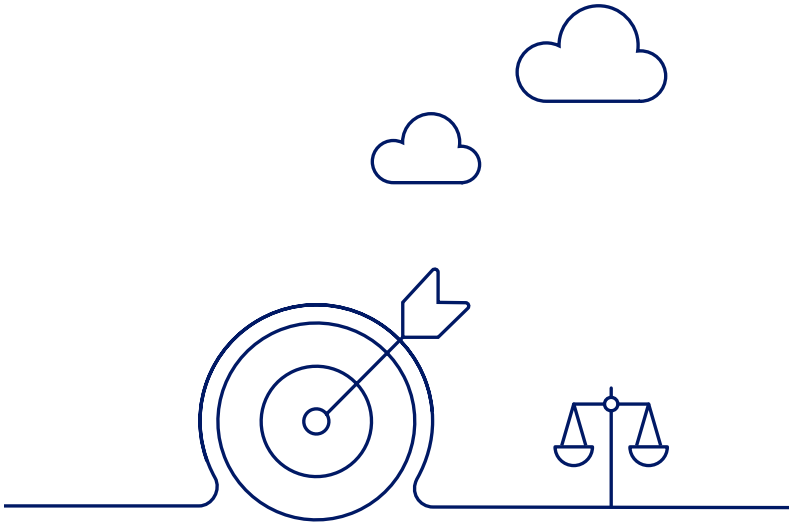


Getting started

Forming a new habit takes time, and sticking to it is more important than doing it perfectly.

Tips to get started

- Start slowly to help to avoid injury
- Don't change everything at once, make gradual changes
- Begin with simple exercise into short sessions throughout the day and build up from there
- Try different ways of being more active and give new activities a chance
- When activity starts to get a little easier, consider adding a couple of extra minutes to your activity each time
- Consider breaking exercise up into smaller sessions – for example you could try 10 minutes, 3 times a day



Use this SMART tool to help you develop your own goals for moving more

Specific	Be specific about your goal, including how often you will work on it
Measurable	Plan how you'll measure your progress and what tools you need
Achievable	Identify what steps you'll take, the potential barriers to your goal (what could get in the way), and how you plan to overcome them
Relevant	Identify why this goal is important and how it'll impact your life
Timely	Decide when you plan to reach your goal and when you'll check your progress

What things might keep you from reaching your goals?

Think about the barriers that might stop you achieving your goals, and how you can address them. With some heart conditions, for example, you may have to think about how intense your exercise can be; the weather may be too hot or too cold, which can put the heart under extra strain, or you may be on medication that affects your heart rate. Always talk to your doctor if in doubt.

Tips to increase physical activity

If you use public transport, try getting off one stop early. If you drive your car, try parking at the far end of the car park or a few roads away.

Go for a walk during your lunch break or other short breaks during the day. If you work from home, try to go for a walk to replace your usual commute time.

Cycle to and from work, or the school run if possible.

Walk for smaller errands. Avoid taking the car or public transport whenever possible.

All physical activity counts: house cleaning, garden work and other chores.

Take the stairs whenever possible.

Tips and guidance

Here are some simple ideas and tips for getting started and exploring new activities.

Start with slow and simple exercise, and increase gradually when you feel comfortable. Remember any increased movement counts!

Tips for exercising

- Try different forms of low impact exercise, such as walking, dancing, swimming, cycling, Tai Chi or yoga*
- Try to make regular walking a part of your weekly routine
- Join a group, or encourage friends or family to exercise with you
- Try to increase the amount of time you move during the day: gardening, housework, and walking while talking on the phone all count as exercise
- Stop exercising and seek medical help if you do not feel well or are in pain during exercise

*Please check with your healthcare professional about whether these suggested exercises are appropriate for you.

It can be common to feel some soreness in your muscles when you begin to exercise. This is normal, but if your pain or discomfort is significant, or continues for more than 2–5 days, then discuss it with your healthcare professional.

Staying healthy
Staying motivated

New healthy lifestyle habits can sometimes be hard to maintain. It is important to stay motivated to stick to your new heart healthy routine.

Tips for staying motivated

- Get your family or friends involved! Have a friend, colleague or family member join you for weekly walks, or cycle rides.

  Exercising with someone can make physical activity something to look forward to.

- When exercising, try to vary your activities to maintain interest. If you get tired of one activity, replace it with another.

  Being active doesn't have to be a chore – you're more likely to stick with it if you're having fun!

- Think about an activity you would like to try and look for clubs or classes in your area.

  Signing up may keep you motivated to continue the activity.

- Remind yourself of your goals. Once you achieve a goal, try increasing it a little to improve more. Reward yourself with a non-edible treat if you reach your weekly aims.

  Don't be too hard on yourself if you don't manage to reach a goal; it is good to understand why you didn't reach your goal. Was it unrealistic? Were there external factors? Reset your goal and try again.

Remember you can contact your healthcare professional at any time if you are uncertain about the best way to maintain a heart healthy lifestyle.

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