



# Eat Yourself to Health

## Nutritional Medicine

**Kirsten Brooks** BSc(Hons), DN Med (Dist)

### Heart Health

Cardiovascular disease is now the biggest killer amongst adults in the UK, leading to around one in three deaths - and the main cause of premature death (death before 75). Whilst these are very sobering statistics, the good news is that we can do lots to protect our heart and circulatory health.

#### A healthy lifestyle

It goes without saying that some of the major risk factors are smoking, obesity (a quarter of UK adults are now obese), excess alcohol and leading a sedentary lifestyle. Just 30 minutes of exercise a day can increase HDL (the good) cholesterol which offsets risks associated with raised LDL cholesterol.

Stress management is also key, because stress hormones thicken the blood (putting us more at risk of excess clotting- strokes and heart attacks) and increase blood pressure amongst other things.

#### Here are some of my heart-friendly dietary suggestions ☺

There should be a focus on a natural whole-food diet, with plenty of fruit and vegetables. These contain antioxidants which protect the arterial walls from damage. Clearly getting your 5 a day is important- less than a quarter of adults currently do so.

-Try and make sure your carbohydrates are in slow releasing forms, such as brown rice and other wholegrains.

-Your diet should be low in sugar and junk foods, as they promote inflammation and inflammation is a risk factor. They are also fattening, especially around the middle - and larger waists are associated with heart disease and type II diabetes.

-Keep saturated fats to a minimum by limiting too much butter, full fat cheese and fatty red meat. Eggs are fine and the British Heart Foundation no longer maintains that they should be unduly restricted.

-Avoid nasty trans fats found in processed foods which raise LDL cholesterol.

-Don't be afraid of the good fats for their well-known preventative effects, especially those found in oily fish, nuts, seeds & oily fish. They promote healthy blood flow, are anti-inflammatory and have protective effects.

-Limit processed food and don't add extra table salt if you have high blood pressure, or use Lo-salt (contains potassium- which may help flush out excess sodium). Along with raised cholesterol, high blood pressure is a well-established risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

#### Here are some specific foods that might help lower cholesterol and are worth emphasising in the diet

Sources of soluble fibre: such as oats (especially oat bran), beans, lentils, peas, chickpeas.

Walnuts, almonds

Soya especially tofu

Garlic

Oily fish

Other heart friendly food

Onions (especially red onions) - contains quercetin, a strong antioxidant which also has blood thinning properties.

Berries, cherries, red grapes - contain antioxidants known as anthocyanins which limit lipid peroxidation. Studies show that berries may decrease risk of heart disease significantly because of their potent flavonoids (antioxidants) which protect the arteries.

Tomatos (lycopene)- another protective antioxidant.

Ginger

Turmeric

Cinnamon

Rice bran

Dark chocolate

Beetroot

Vitamin E rich nutrients- avocado, sunflower seeds, wheat-germ, rice bran oil.

Extra virgin olive oil (but don't heat with it because it is unstable at high temperatures).

Supplements to consider include- Omega 3s, B vitamins to lower homocysteine (elevated levels may be another risk factor), magnesium, vitamin D, vitamin C, ginkgo biloba, garlic and lecithin.

But be aware of taking large quantities of calcium supplements without the right balance of magnesium and vitamin K as a recent study showed a correlation between high intakes and heart disease. It may be that calcium, alongside cholesterol, also forms part of deposits in the arteries if it's not utilised properly, causing restriction of blood flow.

Note that statins (a drug for high cholesterol) deplete coenzyme Q10, which is essential for cellular energy production and a healthy heart, and so anyone taking statins should seek advice regarding adding a good quality CoQ10 supplement.

*Please note I will tailor make a dietary and supplementation programme for each individual.*

**Kirsten Brooks BSc Hon, DN Med is a nutritionist with a degree in Nutritional medicine. She has a practice in South London (Eat Yourself to Health) and frequently writes for national newspapers and various health publications.**