



WELLBEING

A Hearty APPETITE?

Want to eat your way to lower cholesterol and a healthy heart? The right foods could make all the difference, as a new book demonstrates

Around 60 per cent of Brits have cholesterol levels high enough to be considered a cause for concern, something that could increase their chances of future heart problems. So what should we be eating – and avoiding – to improve things? It's a question many of us consider when planning our meals but it's also one that can be surprisingly difficult to answer.

To help us navigate our way through the maze of misinformation and mixed messages, Dr Laura Corr, a cardiologist at Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital in

London, and nutritionist Ian Marber have written a book to clarify things.

"I was so frustrated with the misinformation about what constitutes a healthy heart diet that I teamed up with Laura to set the record straight," says Ian, one of the UK's most respected nutritionists and the co-author of *Eat Your Way to Lower Cholesterol*.

The result is a straightforward, no-nonsense guide that not only identifies the foods you should and shouldn't eat to lower your cholesterol but also



SIX HEART-HEALTHY FOODS

Fibre The current advice is to eat 18g a day but research suggests that to lower cholesterol, we should up that amount to 20g or more. Ian recommends that almost half of this total (9g a day) comes from oats, with the remaining 11g from beans, pulses, vegetables, whole grains and fruit (whole, not juices).

Healthy oils Although saturated fat might increase LDL cholesterol, unsaturated fats can raise HDL cholesterol, helping your body to mop up any excess and return it to the liver. Studies show that you should have 25ml of virgin olive oil – two tablespoons – a day drizzled over salads or with bread in place of butter.

Soya It's thought that the isoflavones compounds in soya might reduce LDL cholesterol made by the body. One study found that a daily soya intake of 30g reduced cholesterol by one per cent.

Nuts Almonds, brazils, hazelnuts, macadamias, pecans, pistachios and walnuts all have a beneficial effect on cholesterol. They are also rich in protein, fibre and vitamin E. Aim to eat 30g a day, the equivalent of around 20 almonds.

Oats Oats contain a form of soluble fibre called beta-glucan which binds to excess cholesterol and stops it from being absorbed in the intestines. Studies say that you need 3g of beta-glucan a day to reduce your cholesterol by five to ten per cent. A single oatcake provides 1g and a small bowl of porridge has 3g.

Smart foods These include heart-healthy yoghurt shots and fortified foods such as Flora pro.activ which contain plant sterols and stanols that seem to fool your body into producing less LDL. Research shows that 2g of these sterols and stanols each day, taken with your main meal, can reduce your cholesterol by 15 per cent.

features recipes incorporating the good guys into delicious meals.

According to the authors, we should all be eating more fibre, nuts, oats, soya, heart-healthy oils and smart foods. "Adding these foods to your diet can lower your cholesterol and reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke," says Ian.

Given that not all cholesterol is the same, it is hardly surprising that we struggle with the word and what it means for our long-term health. Says Ian: "We need cholesterol for every cell in our body and it is essential for a healthy nervous system, digestion and endocrine or hormonal balance."

"When medical experts talk about cholesterol, they are actually talking about a mix of

cholesterol and proteins called lipoprotein and this is how our bodies transport cholesterol in our bloodstream. There are two types: low density lipoprotein, LDL, which is how our bodies deliver cholesterol to the cells, and high density lipoprotein, HDL, the way our bodies mop up excess cholesterol from cells and blood. It's our levels of LDL that should be a cause for concern while the ratio between LDL and HDL is also important. It's not just one single number but the balance between the two."

Once you know your numbers, that is when it might be time to consider making changes. Says Ian: "Certain foods prevent our bloodstream from absorbing too much cholesterol – these are things like fibre and oats – while other foods, like

healthy oils and nuts, stop the damage cholesterol does once it's in our bodies."

When it comes to foods traditionally considered to be "baddies", many of us are still getting it wrong. "Some foods are singled out as being high in cholesterol but that is often incorrect and misleading," Ian says. "For foods like red meat and dairy, as ever, moderation is crucial. But eggs and shellfish are fine to include in a healthy diet. It's sugar and processed foods that appear to be the key to causing obesity and associated high cholesterol."

• *Eat Your Way to Lower Cholesterol: Recipes to Reduce Cholesterol by up to 30% in Under 3 Months* by Ian Marber and Dr Laura Corr (£16.99, Orion Books; eBook, £8.49) is out now

EAT TO YOUR HEART'S CONTENT

Extracted from *Eat Your Way to Lower Cholesterol* and created using cholesterol-lowering ingredients, these recipes not only taste great, they are also very good for you.



EGGS WITH SPICY TOMATOES AND BEANS

Tinned haricot beans are a great store-cupboard staple but make sure you buy the ones in plain water with no added sugar or salt.

Serves 2

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- ½ onion, diced
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 1 red pepper, deseeded and sliced
- 400g tin chopped tomatoes
- 200g tinned haricot beans, rinsed and drained (or flageolet beans)
- ½ fresh red chilli, deseeded and chopped
- 1 tbsp tomato purée
- ½ tsp hot paprika
- Pinch cayenne pepper
- 2 eggs
- 1 tbsp chopped flat-leaf parsley
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan over a medium heat. Add the onion and sauté for a few minutes until it begins to soften. Add the garlic and red pepper and cook for 5 minutes, until softened.
2. Stir in the tomatoes and beans then add the chopped red chilli, tomato purée, paprika and cayenne pepper. Reduce the heat and simmer for 15 minutes, stirring regularly, until the mixture has reduced by half.
3. Season with a little salt and plenty of black pepper then crack the eggs directly into the tomato mixture. Cook for 10 minutes or until the egg whites are firm, the yolks still runny and the sauce has further reduced slightly. Garnish with chopped parsley and serve immediately.



HARISSA CHICKEN

It's the harissa, a hot, aromatic paste made from chilli, that gives this dish a real kick. Giant couscous, with its pearl-like grains, is a great alternative to regular couscous and will give you a decent dose of fibre, too.

Serves 2

- 2 skinless chicken breasts
- 4 tsp harissa paste
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 60g pine nuts
- 100g giant couscous
- 2 spring onions, chopped
- ¼ cucumber, chopped
- 2 tomatoes, chopped
- 200g tinned chick peas, rinsed and drained
- 30g raisins
- Handful flat-leaf parsley, chopped
- Handful mint, chopped
- Extra virgin olive oil, to serve
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Preheat the oven to 170°C/325°F/Gas mark 3. Smear each chicken breast with 2 teaspoons of the harissa paste and place in an ovenproof dish. Drizzle over the oil, season with salt and pepper and bake for 20-25 minutes until cooked through.
2. Put the pine nuts in a dry frying pan and place over a medium heat for a few minutes to toast. Remove from the heat as soon as they turn golden as they can burn quickly.
3. Bring a pan of salted water to the boil and cook the giant couscous according to the packet instructions. Drain and then combine with all the remaining ingredients.
4. Serve each chicken breast on a bed of the couscous salad, drizzled with extra virgin olive oil.



LIME YOGHURT CRUNCH

A great tasting dessert that is practically sugar free is quite hard to come by, making this perfect for anyone seeking a heart-healthy alternative.

Serves 4

- 60g shelled pistachios
- 500g unsweetened soya yogurt
- Grated zest of 2 limes

For the granola

- 250g jumbo oats
- 100g walnuts, roughly chopped
- 1 tbsp wheatgerm
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp clear honey
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 large egg white

1. Blitz the pistachios in a food processor until you have rough crumbs.
2. Preheat the oven to 160°C/300°F/Gas mark 2 and line a baking sheet with non-stick baking parchment. Make the granola by combining the oats, walnuts, wheatgerm, olive oil, honey and cinnamon in a large bowl, tossing to coat evenly.
3. In a separate bowl, whisk the egg white until white and frothy. Stir evenly into the granola. Spread the mixture on the lined baking sheet and bake for 50 minutes. About halfway through, use a large spatula to carefully turn over sections of the granola. When it is evenly browned and feels dry to the touch, transfer to a cooling rack.
4. Allow to cool before breaking up into clusters.
5. Stir the lime zest into the soya yogurt.
6. Place a layer of granola clusters in the bottom of four glasses or bowls. Top with a generous tablespoon of the lime yogurt and a generous amount of chopped pistachios. Repeat this layering process and serve immediately.