



THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Accredited practising dietitian and mother Vanessa Schuldt has this advice for mums



It's almost spring and that means, after too many stodgy meals and sticky puddings over winter, it's time to sweep clean the arteries and cleanse the heart.

You may think heart health is only men's business, but coronary heart disease claims more than four times as many women's lives as breast cancer. These seven heart-friendly eating tips are sure to put an extra beat in your chest:

1 Limit foods high in saturated fats as they raise levels of LDL-cholesterol, which clogs the arteries. Put the brakes on fatty deli meats, buy lean cuts of meats, choose low-fat dairy products, replace snack foods such as crisps and biscuits with fruit, limit takeaway foods to once a week and switch to margarine spreads and more heart-friendly oils (canola, sunflower, soybean, peanut or olive oil) instead of butter, dairy blends, lard and ghee.

2 If your blood cholesterol level is elevated, try using a plant sterol margarine spread. Plant sterols work by blocking the absorption of cholesterol from the food you eat. Consuming one to one-and-a-half tablespoons of plant sterol-enriched spreads daily can reduce your blood cholesterol level by around 10 percent.

3 Munch through your five serves of vegetables and two serves of fruit daily, as studies show they significantly lower the risk of heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure.

4 Incorporate dried legumes (such as split peas, kidney beans and lentils) and canned beans (baked beans, three-bean mix) into two meals a week. Legumes have been shown to help lower blood cholesterol levels.

5 Enjoy 30g (a small handful) of plain unsalted nuts as a snack five times per week. Research shows this can reduce your risk of heart disease by 30 to 50 percent and can lower blood cholesterol levels by 10 percent.

6 Embrace wholegrain foods like wholemeal and mixed-grain breads, wholegrain breakfast cereals, rolled oats, brown rice and wholemeal pasta. When regularly included in a balanced diet, wholegrains can reduce heart disease risk by 20 to 40 percent.

7 Eat omega-3 rich fish (including salmon, tuna and mackerel) at least twice weekly and include plant-based omega-3 foods such as canola oil, soybean oil, linseeds and walnuts. Omega-3 fats act in various ways to protect the heart from damage.

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