

# Heart Health

Heart disease affects around 170,000 New Zealanders and is a major cause of death. According to the Heart Foundation, one New Zealander dies from heart disease every 90 minutes, yet many of these deaths are premature and preventable. The good news is that these are things we can change and doing so can significantly reduce your heart disease risk.

## Heart disease: what happens?

The major cause of heart disease is a build-up of fatty material inside the artery walls, known as atherosclerosis. These fatty deposits gradually clog up the arteries, reducing blood flow to the heart.

Your heart muscle needs a constant supply of oxygen to pump blood around the body. It gets oxygen from the blood, which flows to your heart muscle through arteries on its surface, known as the coronary arteries.

Narrowing or blockage of these arteries results in reduced blood

flow and oxygen to the heart, causing angina or chest pain. When blood flow stops completely, a heart attack occurs.

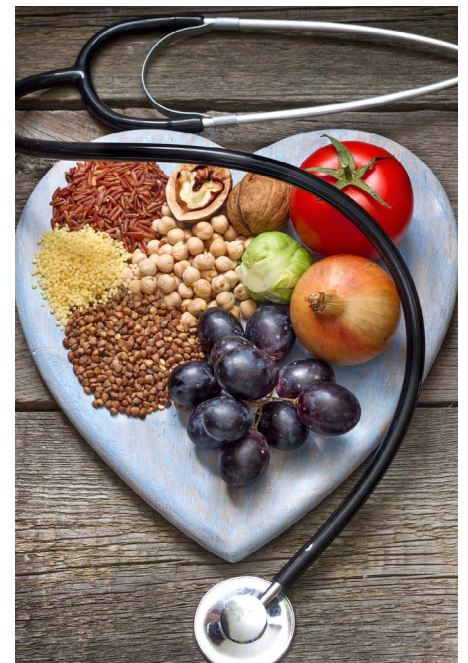
*Lifestyle changes can go a long way towards preventing and managing risk factors for heart disease.*

If not treated quickly, this can result in permanent damage to the heart muscle.

## Target your risk factors

There are some risk factors for heart disease that we can't change such as genetics, age and gender. However, there are many more that we can do something about including:

- Smoking
- High blood cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Physical inactivity
- Diet
- Depression, social isolation and a lack of social support.



## Reversing heart disease

Lifestyle changes can go a long way towards preventing and managing risk factors for heart disease.

What is less well known is that lifestyle changes can also reverse the narrowing of the arteries and reduce the need for medication and invasive surgery (such as cardiac stents and bypass surgery). Researchers have shown that in those with existing

heart disease, an intensive lifestyle modification program addressing diet, activity levels, smoking cessation, stress management and social support, was more effective at reversing heart disease than medication plus standard lifestyle change recommendations. This suggests it's never too late to make lifestyle changes!

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## Top 10 nutrition tips

1. Fill your plate at main meals with a variety of different coloured vegetables and salads – aim for at least five serves each day.
2. Choose fibre-rich wholegrains such as oats, barley, brown rice, wholegrain pasta, quinoa, freekeh, bulghur, dense wholegrain bread and lower sugar wholegrain breakfast cereals rather than refined grains. Oats and barley are good sources of soluble fibre, which can help with cholesterol-lowering. Make at least half of your grain serves wholegrains.
3. Avoid processed meats, reduce red meat and instead choose more plant proteins such as legumes, tempeh and tofu. If you are not vegetarian or vegan, include two to three serves of fish per week, including oily fish.
4. Include at least 3-4 small handfuls (30g) of unsalted nuts or seeds a week.
5. Replace saturated fats (found in animal foods, palm and coconut oil) with healthy fats from foods like extra-virgin olive oil, nuts, seeds and avocado.
6. Replace processed snack foods with healthier options such as fresh fruit, unsalted nuts and hummus and raw vegetables.
7. Choose low sodium products (look for those with less than 120mg/100g) and replace salt in cooking with fresh or dried herbs and spices, onion,

garlic, vinegar and lemon or lime juice.

8. Choose water as your main drink and avoid or limit sugar-sweetened drinks.
9. Include soy foods which contain high-quality protein. Aim for 25g soy protein per day (1-3 serves) from foods such as soy beans, edamame, tofu, tempeh, soymilk or yoghurt and soy and linseed breads.
10. Include plant-sterol enriched foods, such as breakfast cereals, spreads and milk, aiming for 2-3 g plant sterols per day. Plant sterols are naturally occurring components of plants which can act to lower cholesterol levels in the blood but are only present in small amounts naturally in food.



## Other tips

In addition to eating a healthy diet, there are a number of other lifestyle habits that can significantly reduce your risk of heart disease.

- If you smoke, quit. This is one of the best things you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease and improve your overall health.
- Get moving. Schedule in regular exercise, incorporate more movement into your day and limit your sitting time.
- If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation (no more than two standard drinks per day).
- Get enough sleep.
- Take care of your mental health and build a good support team around you.
- Maintaining a healthy body weight. Losing excess weight will help to improve your cholesterol levels, reduce blood pressure, and reduce inflammation.



## Connect with Sanitarium

Do you have a question about nutrition? If you're looking to find out how much iron you need in your diet or you would like some tips on how to encourage your family to eat a little healthier, Sanitarium's expert team of dietitians can help. Our free *Ask A Dietitian* service on our website offers general advice on how to live a healthy lifestyle.

Plus, subscribe to our *Recipe of the Week* and *Wholicious Living* newsletters. You'll receive weekly inspiration on healthy vegetarian recipes and a monthly mix of articles on health, wellbeing and nutrition.

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