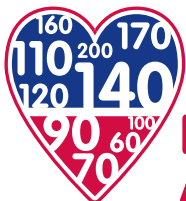


# Healthy eating

The African Caribbean way

Helping you take control  
of your blood pressure



**Blood Pressure  
Association**

Know your numbers!®

# Healthy eating - The African Caribbean way

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## Introduction

If you are of African Caribbean descent, then this booklet is written for you.

People of African Caribbean descent are particularly at **high risk of having a stroke**.

**High blood pressure increases your risk of having a stroke or a heart attack.** You can help to reduce this risk, by eating a healthy diet.

This booklet gives you practical information and ideas about how to eat a healthy diet, which will help you to lower your blood pressure.

Traditional African Caribbean dishes can be high in salt, which raises your blood pressure.

People of African Caribbean descent are more sensitive to the effects of salt compared with other ethnic groups. Doctors do not fully understand the reasons for this. So this means that African Caribbean people get more benefit from lowering the amount of salt in their diet.



## What is healthy eating?

A healthy balanced diet contains:

- Starchy foods such as bread, rice, pasta, potatoes, yams and sweet potatoes
- At least five portions of fruit and vegetables daily
- Moderate amounts of dairy products, look for low fat versions where possible
- Low amounts of salt

It is important to eat a healthy diet because it can reduce your risk of developing certain illnesses and serious diseases, for example a stroke or heart attack.

*To cook healthier dishes, try to use less salt and reduce the amount of fat that you use.*



**The following is a list of some popular African Caribbean dishes that may contain too much salt and saturated fats.**

Antigua, Montserrat, Nevis	Fish soup, pepper pot soup
Barbados	Jug-jug black pudding
Belize	Conch fritters, rice and chicken, tamales, refried beans and iswa
Dominica	Tannia, mountain chicken
Grenada	Callaloo, lambi souse
Guyana	Mellagee
Jamaica	Brown george, roasted breadfruit, saltfish and ackee
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	Stewed shark
British Virgin Islands	Saltfish and rice, fish chowder, conch salad
Trinidad and Tobago	Kachouri, palouri, pelau, pakoras
Guadeloupe and Martinique	Pate en pot, mechoui

## Salt

Cutting down on salt can help you to lower your blood pressure in weeks, which lowers your risk of heart disease and stroke.

The more salt you eat, the higher your blood pressure will be. You should limit your salt intake to 6g per day. Targets for children are much lower e.g. children aged four to six should only eat up to 3g of salt per day.

### Tips on how to eat less salt

#### Eat more natural foods

Natural foods contain little or no salt. Choose from:



Low-fat and low-salt dairy produce e.g. natural yoghurt and skimmed milk

Starchy foods like potatoes, cassava, yam, grains, oats and rice



Fruits, vegetables and pulses (fresh, frozen, dried or tinned with no salt)

Fresh fish, plain chicken, lean meat, eggs, unsalted nuts and seeds

#### Eat less processed foods

75% of the salt in our foods is found in processed foods. However many traditional African Caribbean dishes have salt added during preparation or cooking.

Examples of processed foods are:



Bread and sandwiches

Tinned and packet soups

Salted, smoked or tinned fish

Most breakfast cereals



Biscuits, cakes and crackers

Fast foods e.g. chinese and indian takeaways or hamburgers



Ready made meals e.g. pizzas, pasta dishes or curry

Meat products e.g. bacon, sausages or tinned meat

Snacks e.g. crisps or peanuts



Instant foods e.g. noodles

Some brands of baked beans

## Look at food labels when buying foods



Salt has the chemical name **sodium chloride**. Sodium is one part of salt, the other part is chloride.

Sometimes sodium is listed on food labels instead of salt.

**1g sodium = 2.5g salt**

So, if the label lists sodium, to work out the amount of salt from the sodium content you should multiply it by 2.5.

**Low salt** = Less than 0.25g salt (0.1g of sodium) per 100g

**Moderate salt** = Between 0.25g salt (0.1g of sodium) and 1.25g salt (0.5g sodium) per 100g

**High salt** = More than 1.25g salt (0.5g of sodium) per 100g

## **Foods that contain salt:**

Check the label to see if it lists the amount of salt per serving or in the whole pack. You may not be eating the whole pack, so you need to work out how much salt is in the amount of food you are eating.

It is important to **cut down on the amount of salt that you add to your food** when you are cooking.

## **When cooking foods:**

Do not add salt to the cooking water when you cook foods like potatoes, carrots, pasta and rice – otherwise the food will be higher in salt.

## **Avoid using the following high-salt products to flavour foods:**

- Table salt, sea salt, rock salt
- Garlic salt, stock cubes, soy sauce, gravy granules, ready-made mustard, pickles, sauces like ketchup or brown sauce
- Curry powders and some spices **often have added salt** – **check the label**



Try to use alternatives to salt such as;



- Herbs and spices, pepper, chillies
- Ginger, cinammon, lemon juice, vinegar



- Annatto seeds are used to flavor soups, stews, and fish dishes



- Curry powder made from a variety of **freshly home ground spices**



- Pimento, also known as allspice, is used in pickles, marinades, soups, and stews and is an important ingredient in jerking

Jerking is a method of cooking meat and poultry. Meat and chicken, can be marinated in a mixture of scallions, garlic, thyme, onion, and lemon juice, **without having to use salt.**

**Remember -**  
cutting down on salt can help you to lower your blood pressure

## Fruit and vegetables

**Why are fruit and vegetables good for you?**

They are a good natural source of potassium, which has the opposite effect to salt and will help to **lower your blood pressure.**

The vitamins, minerals and fibre that fruit and vegetables provide can help to lower your risk of serious health problems like heart disease, stroke and some cancers.

They increase your energy levels, improve your bowel function and enable your body to deal with stress.

Fruit and vegetables are important for everyone – not just adults but children too. Our likes and dislikes of foods are formed in the first few years of life, so it's important to give children lots of fruit and vegetables to try. It will help them develop a taste for them, meaning they will be more likely to eat fruit and vegetables as teenagers and adults.

It is important to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

## How much is a portion?

A portion is 80g of fresh, frozen, raw or canned fruit or vegetables (not including any peel, skin or parts that you don't eat).

## Here are some examples:



- 1 medium fruit e.g. banana, papaya
- 1/2 large fruit e.g. mango
- 2 small fruits e.g. plums, satsumas
- A handful of grapes
- 3 tablespoons of vegetables e.g. carrots, cabbage, okra or pulses (e.g. chick peas, lentils, beans)



- 1 medium onion
- 1 heaped tablespoon of dried fruit
- 1 dessert bowl of mixed salad
- 1 glass (150ml) of fruit or vegetable juice
- 1 glass (150ml) of pure fruit smoothie



## How much fruit and vegetables should I be eating?

Aim to eat at least 'five each day'.



Potatoes, cassava, sweet potatoes, yams and plantain are types of vegetable but they do not count towards 'five each day'. Instead they are classed as 'starchy foods' which should still be included as part of a healthy diet.



Pulses, fruit and vegetable juice count towards 'five each day' but you can only include one portion of juice and one portion of pulses per day, no matter how much you drink or eat.





## Fats and cholesterol

Palm oils, and coconut oils, which are commonly used in African Caribbean cooking, are very high in **saturated fat**. Try using a healthy alternative such as **monounsaturated fat** like olive oil or rapeseed oil instead.

Saturated fat directly raises your cholesterol levels and can cause weight gain.

### What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a fatty material mainly made in the body from saturated fat in your diet. It plays a vital role in cell function throughout the body and is the building block of many essential steroid hormones. However, too much in the blood causes narrowing or furring in your arteries and increases your risk of heart attack or stroke. The risk is much greater if you have high blood pressure.

Cholesterol is carried on proteins known as lipoproteins.

There are two types of cholesterol in your body:

**LDL (low density lipoprotein)** – this transports cholesterol from the liver to the cells

**HDL (high density lipoprotein)** – this removes LDL cholesterol from your arteries and returns excess cholesterol back to the liver

### Why are cholesterol tests important?

High levels of blood cholesterol indicate a greater risk of coronary heart disease.

### Cholesterol and heart disease

The cause of coronary heart disease is a narrowing of the arteries that supply the heart caused by a gradual accumulation of fatty material, a condition known as atherosclerosis.

Atherosclerosis (arteriosclerosis) occurs when LDL cholesterol is deposited on the walls of the coronary arteries. HDL removes this cholesterol from the circulation and protects against coronary heart disease.

The ratio of HDL to LDL is therefore very important and everyone should aim for a low level of LDL and a high level of HDL.



## What should my cholesterol level be?

Your doctor will want to know your total cholesterol level as well as the ratio of the bad cholesterol (LDL) to good cholesterol (HDL). You should be aiming for:

- Total cholesterol level of less than 5 mmol/l
- LDL cholesterol of less than 3 mmol/l (ideally 2 mmol/l)
- HDL cholesterol above 1 mmol/l

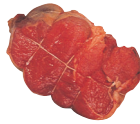
(mmol/l is an abbreviation for millimoles per litre of blood).

## Causes of high cholesterol

The most common causes of high cholesterol are too much saturated fat in the diet, lack of physical exercise and also an inherited tendency to produce too much cholesterol called familial hypercholesterolaemia.



## How do I cut down on saturated fat?



Try eating less red meat. When you do eat red meat, cut off all the fat you can see and grill rather than fry it.



Try to eat only low-fat dairy products, e.g. fully skimmed milk or low-fat yoghurts.



Try to avoid all meat products such as sausages, paté and bacon.



Avoid coconut oil, palm oil and lard (or other animal fats).

Avoid baked foods that are high in fat such as pastry, croissants, manufactured cakes and biscuits.

Be careful with foods that are labelled as lower or reduced fat as these may still contain large amounts of fat.

Butter and margarine should be avoided. Many contain large amounts of salt and some margarines contain trans fatty acids. It is best to use olive oil or very low-fat spreads using soya or oils which contain no trans fatty acids.

Trans fatty acids are naturally present in small amounts in meat and dairy produce. In order to harden oils, some are “hydrogenated” (a manufacturing process) to produce trans fatty acids. These may be harmful as they increase LDL cholesterol and also lower HDL cholesterol. Avoid using foods or spreads that contain them; check the ingredients list for the word “hydrogenated” or look for products that state they contain no trans fats.

**The two healthiest types of fat or oil that you can use are:**

**Monounsaturated fat:** This fat is found in olive and rapeseed oil as well as walnut oil and avocados. Olive or rapeseed oils are the best

fats or oils to use, but remember all oils are very high in calories. For example, one tablespoon of olive oil has the same calories as four apples or two slices of bread.

**Polyunsaturated fat:** This is found in sunflower, soya and cornflower oils etc, and can be used if rapeseed or olive oil is not available.

It is important to be your **ideal weight** – you can find out what weight you should be from your GP or practice nurse.

If you are concerned about your weight your GP or practice nurse may refer you to a dietitian, who can give you information about diet programmes.



## Alcohol

There is good evidence to show that if you drink alcohol in large amounts it can cause your blood pressure to rise.

Committees from the Royal College of Physicians and other Colleges have suggested a limit of 21 units of alcohol per week for men and 14 units of alcohol per week for women. Men have a higher limit because they tend to have larger and heavier bodies with more water in them compared to women and also because they tend to deal with alcohol in the body in a different way.

### What is a unit of alcohol?



A unit of alcohol is:

- A small glass of wine (125ml)
- Half a pint of medium strength beer, lager or cider
- A pub measure of a shot of spirits (25ml)
- A pub measure of sherry or fortified wine (50ml)

Some manufacturers have started to label their products, so that you can tell how many units it contains.

## Sugar

Eating too much sugar can lead to weight gain over time, which puts you at risk of high blood pressure. Sugary foods are high in calories and can lead to a quick energy rush followed by a slump afterwards. This may cause you to feel sluggish and low in energy and can lead to cravings for more sugary foods, so that you eat too much and put on weight.

There is strong evidence that sugar, which is digested and absorbed quickly by the body, can cause raised blood sugar and insulin levels which in the long-term may be harmful to your health, being linked to diabetes and heart disease. Sugar is also an important cause of tooth decay.

When you are making the following traditional desserts try and use less sugar:

- banana bread
- gingerbread
- potato pudding

## Key Points

- People of African Caribbean descent are particularly at **high risk of having a stroke or heart attack**
- Changes to the food that you eat, as well as other changes in your lifestyle, will help you to lower your blood pressure
- A healthy diet may help to make the tablets you are taking for high blood pressure more effective
- Reducing the amount of salt that you eat, and eating more fruits and vegetables, will help lower your blood pressure
- Eating less saturated fat will help to lower your cholesterol and this will lower your risk of heart attack or stroke
- Changing the foods that you eat will help you to feel better and become healthier, as well as reducing your blood pressure, cholesterol levels and your risk of heart attack and stroke

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