

Healthy eating advice following a stroke

Information for patients and carers

This guide explains how and why, what you eat affects your risk of stroke. It suggests some simple ways you can make your diet healthier, reduce blood pressure, maintain a healthy weight and lower cholesterol.



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Carbohydrates - Carbohydrates provide your body with energy. They are a source of nutrients such as calcium, fibre, iron, and B vitamins. Carbohydrate foods can make up a third of the food we eat. Many people think starchy foods are fattening; however, they contain less calories than fat. Aim to have moderate portions and be mindful of the added fats used when cooking/serving them, for example butters, oil and sauces will increase the calorie content.

Wholegrains - Some carbohydrates contain wholegrains, the seeds from cereal plants like wheat, rye, barley, oats and rice. A 'whole grain' is the entire grain without the outer layer removed. The outer layers contain important nutrients, such as fibre, vitamins and minerals. They are removed to produce refined carbohydrates like white bread, white pasta and white rice.

Eating foods containing wholegrains helps to keep us healthy and reduces the risk of many common diseases including heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes. If you are unable to eat gluten or wheat, try buckwheat, brown rice, quinoa and millet.

Fibre - Adults should aim to eat 30g of fibre every day to help lower cholesterol, maintain stable blood glucose levels and help with weight loss.

- **Soluble fibre** is found in fruit, vegetables, beans and pulses. It can help you feel fuller for longer, regulate blood sugar and reduce cholesterol. It reduces cholesterol by binding to excess cholesterol and fatty substances in your gut. This prevents them getting into your blood stream.
- **Insoluble fibre** can be found in the skin of fruit and vegetables. It is also present in wholegrain carbohydrate foods such as wholegrain pasta, bread and brown rice. It helps food move through the bowel and improve the health of your gut by balancing your good gut bacteria.

Fruits and vegetables - Fruit and vegetables contain fibre and should make up at least 1/3rd of your daily diet. Eat at least five portions daily to reduce your risk of stroke. Gradually increase the number of portions you eat to prevent bowel discomfort.

Fruits and vegetables contain vitamins, minerals, and nutrients, including antioxidants such as vitamins A, C and E. Including a range of vitamins and minerals in your diet helps prevent damage to your arteries. Aim for a varied range of different coloured fruits and vegetables to provide a wide range of vitamins. Fresh, tinned and frozen fruits and vegetables all provide benefits.

All fruits and vegetables contain potassium, a mineral known to prevent high blood pressure. However, richer sources are bananas, nuts, potatoes and mushrooms.



Vegetarian/vegan – Vegetarian/vegan diets can be healthy as can contain plenty of vegetables, however, they can sometimes contain less protein. Beans and pulses can be eaten as an alternative protein to meat and fish. Beans and pulses contain vitamins, minerals and soluble fibre which can help lower your cholesterol. Soya products such as tofu, tempeh and meat alternatives (mycoproteins) also provide protein.

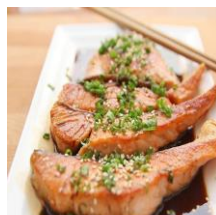
Nuts are another good source of protein, also providing healthy fats and fibre. They are high in calories, so you only need a small handful

Protein - Your body needs protein for growth and repair of cells and tissues. It is vital for maintaining muscle strength and wound healing. Protein is also vital for helping the body to make new cells and hormones.

Meat, fish, eggs, pulses, beans, dairy products and nuts are all good sources of protein. Animal protein includes beef, pork, chicken, lamb, duck and offal. Some meats are leaner than others meaning they contain less fat, usually visible on the meat.

Beef, lamb, mutton, pork, goat, veal and venison are all types of red meat. Red meat provides us with iron, zinc and B vitamins, including vitamin B12. If we include it in our diet, we should aim for leaner cuts and only once or twice per week. Chicken and turkey tend to contain less fat.

- Aim for leaner cuts of meat for a healthier choice.
- One portion of protein equates roughly to the size of the palm of your hand, approximately 70g of meat or 140g fish.
- Two medium eggs.
- 150g of beans or pulses



Fish - Including fish in your diet at least twice per week helps provide some vitamins and minerals that many people lack. Aiming to include oily fish once per week like mackerel, salmon or trout provides the heart with healthy oils, omega-3 and omega-6, known to be beneficial in reducing the risk of many diseases.

Fat - We all need some fat in our diet. It helps our body store and absorb vitamins and minerals. Having fat in our diet also helps the body make essential fatty acids such as omega 3 and omega 6, we can only get these fatty acids from food. They are required for many body processes and to help cells function. However, fat is very high in calories and too much can lead to weight gain.

- **Saturated fats** can raise 'bad' cholesterol in our blood. They are mainly found in fatty cuts of red meat, sausages, pies, cakes and biscuits, and processed meals and snacks. Saturated fats are usually solid at room temperature, like butter, cheese, lard, coconut oil, palm oil, ghee and cream. You can reduce your risk of stroke by reducing your intake of saturated fat and switching to small amounts of unsaturated fats.
- **Unsaturated fats** are mainly found in fish, nuts, seeds, avocados and oils such as olive and vegetable oils. They are also found in some spreads. They can help reduce cholesterol, the risk of blocked arteries and blood clots that cause a stroke. Unsaturated fats tend to be liquid (not solid) at room temperature.
- **Trans fats** (hydrogenated fats) are artificial fats added to processed foods like cakes, biscuits and margarine. They are made from a processed form of liquid oils and turned into a solid fat to increase the shelf life of processed foods. They may be labelled as emulsifiers or hydrogenated fat or hydrogenated vegetable oil on food labels. Trans fats raise 'bad' cholesterol and reduce 'good' cholesterol in your blood, which can increase your risk of stroke.



Sugar - Foods containing sugar can cause weight gain because we are often having more calories than our body needs. Our body stores extra sugar as fat, leading to weight gain. Weight gain can increase your risk of stroke, as well as other related conditions such as type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol and heart disease.

- High levels of hidden sugar can be found in many common foods and drinks such as ready-made sauces, tinned soups, beans and many breakfast cereals. Beware of foods labelled as low fat; they can often contain extra sugar to help enhance the flavour.
- Sugar can have many names on food labels, for example: - glucose, fructose, dextrose, agave syrup, honey and corn syrup.

Salt - Salt contains sodium, essential to help keep body fluids at the right level. Too much salt can cause fluid levels in the body to rise, which can cause high blood pressure. High blood pressure is a risk factor for stroke. By reducing the amount of salt you eat you can lower your blood pressure and your risk of stroke.

- Most of the salt we eat is in ready-made foods like bread, cereals, cakes, biscuits, soups and sauces. Many processed foods such as sausages, bacon and ready-meals contain high levels of salt.
- Aim for no more than six grams of salt a day, about a teaspoon. Labels can be confusing and may label sodium instead of salt. Herbs and spices can also be used to add taste to meals.
- The DASH diet (**Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension**) is a diet that has been shown to reduce blood pressure. It contains lots of fruit, vegetables, whole grains, healthy oils and lean proteins while limiting salt, saturated fats and added sugars.

Food Labels – Many prepacked foods have nutrition labels on the packaging. These labels include information on energy (calories), protein, carbohydrates, sugars, saturated fat, fat and salt. They may also mention fibre.

Energy 711kJ/ 171kcal	Fat 9.6g	Saturates 0.8g	Sugars 1.6g	Salt 0.92g
8%	14%	4%	2%	15%

Some foods may have a traffic light system on the front or back of the packaging. The traffic light system indicates low, medium and high levels of sugar, fat, saturated fat and salt within food items. Choosing foods that are mainly green and amber are best. Some labels are a little tricky e.g. nuts may show as red for fat.

Food and Medication – some medications such as warfarin and statins interact with food. So please speak with your GP before changing your diet if you take any of these medications.



Managing your weight

- Reduce portion sizes at mealtimes
- Aim for five fruit and vegetable portions per day
- Base your meals around moderate portions of lean protein, wholegrain carbohydrates and plenty of vegetables or salad
- Choose cooking methods such as steaming, grilling, baking or poaching meals rather than frying
- Aim for lean cuts of meat and trim off any visible fat and skin, use mainly chicken or turkey as they contain less fat
- Read food labels to check fat, sugar and salt content
- Limit your alcohol intake
- Daily exercise/activities where possible



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