

EAT YOUR WAY TO A HEALTHY HEART

- Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Vary the colours so that you get different antioxidants. One portion of fruit is the equivalent of one piece of fruit (such as an apple), a slice of a very large fruit (such as a melon), two small fruits (such as satsumas) or a glass of fruit juice. One portion of vegetables is the equivalent of two tablespoonfuls of raw, cooked, frozen or canned vegetables or a dessert bowlful of salad.
- Buy unsaturated oils (such as olive, rapeseed or sunflower oil) and spreads,

and use them sparingly. A low-fat spread contains half the fat of ordinary margarine.

- Eat two portions of fish per week, one of which should be oily fish (such as mackerel, herring, sardines, salmon or pilchards).
- Base meals on starchy foods such as bread, pasta, rice, potatoes or cereals.
- Eat processed meats, such as beef burgers, sausages and savoury pies, only very occasionally. Instead, choose lean meat, fish, poultry, beans, tofu or Quorn for your meals.
- Cut down on salt. The recommended daily maximum is 6g per day but we need only 1g (about one-fifth of a teaspoonful). Over two-thirds of the salt we eat comes from

processed foods, so look out for reduced-salt products, cook from fresh whenever possible and avoid adding extra salt to your food.

- Choose skimmed or semi-skimmed milk and low-fat yogurts and cheeses (such as cottage cheese).
- Use low-fat cooking methods such as grilling, baking, chargrilling, microwaving, steaming, barbecuing or stir frying (using only a little oil).
- Eat smaller portions of meat (about 4oz) and trim off any visible fat.
- If you have a lot of changes to make, take them one step at a time. Remember, small changes add up to make a big difference.

'For a healthy heart, eat two portions of fish per week, one of which should be oily fish'



coronary heart disease. The research indicates that working in a stressful job with little control over your work doubles your risk of coronary heart disease. 'Stress does have an input in heart disease,' says Shaw, 'but it may have more to do with the way people deal with it. When we're stressed, we may drink and smoke more, turn to comfort foods, which are high in fat, and spend too much time in front of the TV. Always take a break in the middle of your day – a brisk walk can be very therapeutic.'

Just as important is laughter. In a study involving 300 people in the US, who were

given questionnaires to test their humour responses, researchers discovered heart patients were 40 per cent less likely than healthy people to laugh in a variety of common situations. 'When you laugh, there are opium-like chemicals released by your brain,' says Dr Michael Miller, lead researcher and Director of the Center For Preventive Cardiology at the University Of Maryland Medical Center, Baltimore, US. 'These give you a feeling of wellbeing or even euphoria. We believe this causes you to relax and your blood vessels to dilate. Laughter lowers blood pressure and your

pulse rate. My advice is to laugh heartily for at least five minutes each day. Try to see the funny side and take life less seriously.' ■

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

- For information on heart disease, call the British Heart Foundation (BHF) on 020 7935 0185 or write to the British Heart Foundation, 14 Fitzhardinge Street, London W1H 6DH. For a choice of free information packs, call the BHF's Heart Healthline on 0870 6006566 or visit www.bhf.org.uk
- Read *Heart Health At Your Fingertips* (Class Publishing, £14.99) by Dr Graham Jackson. Written in jargon-free language, this question-and-answer-style book covers all aspects of heart disease and how to keep your heart healthy.