

Dietary patterns and the heart



This position statement summarises key findings and recommendations in relation to dietary patterns that support heart health. It is based on the Heart Foundation's 'Dietary Patterns and Heart Health Background Paper 2013' and the USDA's 'Series of Systematic Reviews on the Relationship Between Dietary Patterns and Health Outcomes 2014'.

KEY FINDINGS

Dietary patterns refer to the overall diet and the quantity and combination of foods and drinks typically consumed over a period of time. Research on dietary patterns is particularly meaningful as it reflects typical ways of eating. By looking at the pattern of foods (rather than nutrients), the synergy of foods as a whole and foods eaten together are taken into account.

There is a large body of research from around the world on the types of dietary patterns that support heart health. This research is mostly large prospective cohort studies.

There are a range of dietary patterns that are associated with good health and which show benefit in reducing risk of heart disease. The strongest evidence is for Mediterranean-style diets (in primary and secondary prevention), the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet, and dietary guideline related patterns (or prudent dietary patterns).^(USDA 2014) Other dietary patterns with some evidence include vegetarian and Japanese diets, although findings are less consistent.

Because of variability in how individual dietary patterns are defined, the USDA identified key food components consistent across dietary patterns. They concluded "there is strong and consistent evidence that in healthy adults increased adherence to dietary patterns scoring high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, legumes, unsaturated oils, low-fat dairy, poultry, and fish; low in red and processed meat, high-fat dairy, and sugar-sweetened foods and drinks; and moderate in alcohol is associated with decreased risk of fatal and non-fatal cardiovascular diseases, including coronary heart disease and stroke."^(USDA 2014)

Where specific nutrient intakes were reported, the dietary patterns which reduced risk of heart disease were low in saturated fat and sodium and rich in fibre and potassium.

As well as reducing risk of fatal and non-fatal cardiovascular disease (coronary heart disease and stroke), dietary patterns may have positive effects on risk factors for heart disease such as lipids, blood pressure (in particular the DASH diet reduced blood pressure in adults with raised blood pressure) and metabolic syndrome.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Dietary patterns that support heart health reflect a range of fat, carbohydrate and protein intakes but share common features. These features include less processed foods with plenty of vegetables and fruit, and include other plant foods such as legumes, intact whole grains, nuts, and healthy plant oils; and usually include some fish, poultry, lean meats and reduced fat dairy. They show a theme of healthy eating that can be applied to how we eat in New Zealand.

Applying these themes to typical eating patterns in New Zealand would mean:

- Eating more vegetables and fruit
- Swapping from refined cereals and grains to whole grains
- Eating less processed meats and using more legumes and oily fish
- Choosing reduced-fat varieties of dairy products
- Eating healthy sources of fats such as nuts, seeds, plant oils (other than coconut and palm), avocado, and oily fish in place of animal fats
- Eating less processed foods and cutting back on foods typical of a Western dietary pattern such as junk foods, takeaways, deep-fried foods, pastries, pies, sweet bakery items, lollies, highly processed and refined foods, processed snack foods, sugary drinks, and processed meats.

REFERENCES

USDA 2014. A Series of Systematic Reviews on the Relationship Between Dietary Patterns and Health Outcomes. March 2014. Available from:

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