

Heart Health for Heart Month

by Carrie Eckersley (PCN Dietitian)

♥ Heart Health for Heart Month: Small Changes That Make a Big Difference

February is Heart Month, led by the British Heart Foundation. Heart health is often talked about in terms of risk and restriction, but for most people it shows up in everyday life as energy, stamina, and resilience - how well your body copes with daily demands, illness, stress and recovery.

The habits we repeat most days - what we eat, how we move, how we sleep, and how we look after ourselves - all play a role. The good news is that supporting heart health doesn't require a special diet or major lifestyle overhaul. Small, realistic changes add up over time.



What Does “Heart-Healthy” Actually Mean?



DID YOU KNOW?

Heart-healthy habits are less about cutting things out and more about what you include regularly. Whether we’re talking about food or lifestyle, the same principles apply:

- Support steady energy.
- Reduce strain on the heart over time.
- Build habits that are sustainable, not perfect.

THIS APPROACH HELPS WITH BLOOD PRESSURE, CHOLESTEROL AND BLOOD SUGAR - BUT IT ALSO SUPPORTS DIGESTION, SLEEP, AND OVERALL WELLBEING.



Eating for Heart Health...

PATTERNS MATTER MORE THAN PERFECT MEALS



Heart-healthy eating isn't about following a strict plan.

What matters most is the pattern of eating over time - what your meals usually look like across the week.

Foods that support heart health tend to:

- Keep blood sugar steadier.
- Help manage cholesterol.
- Support blood pressure.
- Help you feel satisfied and fuelled.



These aren't rules - just everyday examples of choices that gently support heart health.



START THE DAY STEADY



Meals that combine fibre, protein, and healthy fats help support steadier energy through the morning.

THINK..

- **Porridge with fruit and a spoon of nuts or seeds.**
- **Wholegrain toast with eggs or peanut butter.**
- **Yogurt with berries and oats.**





Build Fibre into familiar meals

FIBRE PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN HEART AND GUT HEALTH, AND SMALL ADDITIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

- 1 Add lentils or beans to soups, stews, or chilli
- 2 Choose wholegrain bread, rice, or pasta where you can.
- 3 Add extra vegetables to sauces and casseroles.

Let Fats Work for Your Heart..

Fat is an important part of a healthy diet - it's the type that matters most.

- Use olive or rapeseed oil for cooking
- Include oily fish such as salmon, sardines, or mackerel
- Add nuts, seeds, or avocado to meals and snacks





Snacks That Support Heart Health

SNACKS CAN HELP PREVENT LONG GAPS BETWEEN MEALS AND SUPPORT STEADY ENERGY.



Choose things like:

- Fruit with a handful of nuts.
- Yogurt or fromage frais.
- Wholegrain crackers or oatcakes with hummus or cheese.



Salt and Blood Pressure: Focus on the Big Contributors

Most salt in the diet comes from processed and packaged foods, not the salt we add at the table.

Helpful steps include:

- Checking labels where possible.
- Choosing lower-salt versions of everyday foods.
- Using herbs, spices, garlic, lemon, and pepper for flavour.



Even small reductions can support blood pressure over time.





Heart Health Beyond Food



Food matters - but heart health is shaped by everyday habits working together.



Smoking & Alcohol



DID YOU KNOW?

- Stopping smoking is one of the most powerful actions for heart health.
- Reducing alcohol intake can help lower blood pressure and improve sleep.

EVEN SMALL CHANGES CAN HAVE BENEFITS OVER TIME.

Sleep & Stress



DID YOU KNOW?

Poor sleep and long-term stress can affect blood pressure, blood sugar, and heart health.

HELPFUL STEPS INCLUDE:

- Keeping regular sleep and wake times.
- Creating a simple wind-down routine.
- Getting daylight and gentle movement during the day.



Movement: Little and Often Counts



DID YOU KNOW?

- You don't need intense exercise to support your heart.
- Walking, gardening, housework, and cycling all count.
- Short bouts of movement through the day add up.
- Enjoyment and consistency matter more than intensity.

SMALL CHANGES ADD UP...

- Heart health isn't about doing everything perfectly.
- It's about stacking small, realistic habits - food, movement, sleep and awareness - in ways that fit everyday life.