

How to Look After Your Heart Health through your diet

Categories: Health
Publication: 1 May 2020
Reading time: 4 minutes



As we move into the cooler months and the new normal of spending significantly more time at home, there is a greater focus on how the food we eat can help support a well-balanced, healthy lifestyle. What better place to start than with one of our most important organs, our heart?

To help us understand how our diet can support not only our immune system, but a happy and healthy heart function, nutritionist and gut expert, [Chloe McLeod](#) has shared her insights on how the food we eat can affect stress, our heart and our overall health., Chloe breaks down why we should be incorporating her favourite superfoods into our everyday diets.



What are the best diet choices to help reduce stress?

Include plenty of fibre rich foods, such as wholegrains and legumes. Ensure your plate is filled with a rainbow of colours to optimal nutrition. My favourite humble superfood are eggs, due to their fantastic nutrition profile for stress management – vitamin D, choline, protein and other B vitamins all have an important role to play. Happily, these foods work so well together. Think an omelette with avo, veggies and toast, or zucchini and rice slice, or even a chickpea salad with boiled eggs.

Can stress impact heart health? Can this be mitigated via food choices?

Yes, stress can impact heart health. Many of us will know someone or heard stories of individuals under significant stress who go on to have a heart attack. Chronic stress exposes your body to unhealthy, persistently elevated levels of stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. This is then linked to the way the blood clots and can increase risk of a heart attack.

Some people make poorer food choices when they are stressed or increase the quantity of alcohol they'd usually consume. By following a nutrient dense diet this can help mitigate risk. This means including nutrient dense protein sources, such as eggs, along with plenty of plant-based foods for fibre, micronutrients and healthy fats.

Can you tell us what role eggs play in a stress reducing diet?

Eggs are a great source of good quality protein which help with managing satiety levels. Eggs also contain choline, a nutrient that's needed to produce acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter that impacts the portions of the brain responsible for regulating mood and reducing stress. Plus - eggs are a great source of vitamin D, and it's been shown that adequate vitamin D levels have been linked with reduced risk of depression.

What about eggs and a healthy heart?

Eggs help increase levels of high-density lipoprotein (HDL), or “good” cholesterol as it's commonly known. Higher levels of HDL can help reduce the risk of heart disease. It's low-density lipoprotein (LDL), or "bad" cholesterol, that can put heart health at risk.

The cholesterol eggs contain is not a problem in most cases as it is difficult to absorb; there is no relationship between eating eggs and increased risk of heart disease.

Can you please give one health benefit for each of the following vitamins/nutrients that are found in eggs?

Vitamin B – helps body manage stress more effectively. Vitamins B1,2,3,6 and 12 all help the nervous system function more effectively, which in turn help with stress management.

Vitamin D – adequate levels shown to reduce risk of depression

Choline – a nutrient that's needed to produce acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter that impacts the portions of the brain responsible for regulating mood and reducing stress.

Tryptophan – helps with sleep. It is involved in the making of melatonin, which is the hormone which helps influences your sleep/wake cycle.

What are your top 5 tips for people wanting to create healthy diets their busy schedule?

1. **Be organised.** Planning ahead, stocking your pantry and freezer with healthy options, and knowing what you will eat when makes it much simpler as it means less decision making on the fly, and ensures the healthy choice is the easy choice.
2. **Meal prep.** Similar to being organised, prepping your meals 1-2 times per week means less time spent cooking, resulting in more time for other activities, be it work or play.
3. **Hydrate.** Keep a bottle of water with you to sip on across the day, refilling as needed. This helps prevent unnecessary snacking (as common side effect of dehydration), and also helps improve concentration.
4. **Include a nutritious, balanced lunch.** 3pm is the common time people head to the chocolate jar, however this doesn't need to be you. Choose a meal that is balanced with good quality protein, low GI carbs and loads of veggies to help you feel satisfied but not heavy and avoid reaching for that 3pm chocolate.
5. **Use online shopping.** Getting to the shops, shopping, and getting home from the shops can be time consuming. Create a couple of lists in your preferred online store for your weekly essentials and have them delivered each week.