

Plant Sterols, Omega 3 Fats and Heart Disease



Two topics often talked about in relation to nutrition and heart disease are plant sterols and omega 3 fats. Both of these can help to reduce your risk of heart disease.

Sterols



What are plant sterols?

Plant sterols are naturally occurring parts of all plants. They have been shown to lower blood cholesterol levels by an average of 10%, depending on how much is consumed. Plant sterols work by blocking the absorption of cholesterol, leading to reduced levels of cholesterol in the blood. A reduced blood cholesterol level can reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.

How much is needed to lower blood cholesterol levels?



An intake of about **2 to 3g** (1-1½ tablespoons of sterol enriched spreads) per day is needed to have an effect on blood cholesterol levels, however, it is difficult to achieve this just from natural food sources. Some margarine spreads have had plant sterols added to them to help you achieve this recommended intake.

How do I increase my intake of plant sterols?

Plant sterols are found in margarine spreads with added plant sterols and most plant-based foods. These include vegetable oils, nuts, legumes (dried peas, dried beans and lentils), breads and cereals. Trace amounts can also be found in vegetables and fruit.



Should I use margarine spreads with added plant sterols?

People at risk of heart disease, especially those with high blood cholesterol levels can benefit from using margarine spreads with added plant sterols.

Plant sterol margarine spreads are not meant to replace cholesterol-lowering medication. Research shows that margarine spreads with added plant sterols work together with cholesterol lowering medications to lower blood cholesterol levels even further.

Omega 3 Fats

What are Omega 3 fats?

Omega 3 fats are a type of polyunsaturated fat. They are found in both plant and marine foods and have been shown to reduce your risk of heart disease.

Which foods contain Omega 3 fats?

Good sources of plant-based omega 3 fats are canola and soybean oils and canola based margarine spreads. Marine omega 3 fats are found in fish, particularly oily fish. Fish with the highest amount of omega 3 fats include:

- Atlantic salmon
- Mackerel
- Southern bluefin tuna
- Trevally
- Sardines



The Heart Foundation recommends you eat fish at least twice a week.

Tips to help you increase your intake of omega 3 fats

Choose both plant-based and marine omega 3 food sources as part of a healthy eating pattern.

- Choose vegetable oils such as canola and soybean for cooking, or canola based margarine spreads.
- Use salad dressings and mayonnaise made from canola and soybean oil, or try making your own.
- Choose canned fish such as tuna, salmon and sardines in spring water or oils such as canola, sunflower or olive.
 - eat them with water crackers as a snack; or
 - have them in a sandwich or salad at lunch.
- Fish is very versatile – enjoy it steamed, panfried, baked or barbecued.
 - eat fish whole with lemon, herbs and salad, or
 - add fish to casseroles, pasta or curry for dinner.



Choosing an eating pattern that provides you with good sources of plant sterols and omega 3 fats is only part of overall healthy eating. Remember for good health and good heart health, it is important to enjoy a variety of food everyday, such as vegetables, fruit, legumes, breads, cereals, rice, pasta, lean meats, poultry, fish and reduced fat dairy products.



For further information contact Heartline, the Heart Foundation's national telephone information service, on **1300 36 27 87**, or visit **www.heartfoundation.com.au**.

If you want specific dietary information call **1800 81 29 42** to find an Accredited Practising Dietitian near you.