

# CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH



Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is a term used to describe all diseases of the heart and blood vessels. Coronary heart disease (which includes heart attacks and angina) and stroke are common forms of CVD. In terms of lives lost and health spending, CVD is still considered to be Australia's most costly disease and prevention of CVD is an important national health priority.

The burden of CVD is expected to rise due to the ageing population and the increasing prevalence of risk factors such as obesity.

## Risk factors for CVD

Most CVD is caused by the gradual narrowing or blockage of blood vessels. This process is called atherosclerosis and is due to the build-up of fatty deposits in the lining of blood vessels. When atherosclerosis affects major arteries in the body it can cause a heart attack or stroke.

There are a number of risk factors associated with developing CVD. Some risk factors such as increasing age, male gender and family history cannot be changed. Other risk factors can be addressed through healthy lifestyle changes, including a balanced diet and exercise. These include:

- Excess weight
- Physical inactivity
- Unhealthy diet
- Smoking
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol.

## Dairy foods and cardiovascular health

Dairy foods, such as milk, cheese and yoghurt have long been known for their role in bone health, but research over the last decade has also demonstrated that consumption of these foods is associated with a reduced risk of CVD. The Australian Dietary Guidelines recognise that consuming milk, cheese and yoghurt can protect us against heart disease and related conditions such as stroke and the risk of high blood pressure. Other foods that help to protect against heart disease include fruit and vegetables, grain foods (mostly wholegrain) and fish.

As a result of the updated evidence, the Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend higher intakes of the dairy food group, for most age groups, than previous dietary guidelines.

### Minimum recommended number of serves from the dairy food group

	Age (years)	No. of serves per day
Men	19–70	2 ½
	70+	3 ½
Women	19–50	2 ½
	50+	4
	Pregnant or breast feeding	2 ½

*Adapted from: 2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines. The dairy food group includes milk, cheese, yoghurt and/or alternatives.\**



\*Alternatives include: 250ml soy, rice or other cereal drink with at least 100mg of added calcium per 100ml.

The reason why dairy foods, such as milk, cheese and yoghurt, can help to reduce CVD risk may be due to the nutrients found within them such as the calcium, potassium, magnesium and proteins. Dairy foods also naturally contain phosphorous, carbohydrate, vitamin A, riboflavin, vitamin B12 and zinc – a complete package of 10 essential nutrients.

Unfortunately, most Australians are missing out on the health benefits that come with consuming milk, cheese and yoghurt as they don't include enough in their diet. It is estimated that 8 out of 10 Australian adults need to increase their intake of dairy foods in order to achieve the levels recommended by the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

### Heart healthy tips:

- Follow the Australia Dietary Guidelines [eatforhealth.gov.au](http://eatforhealth.gov.au)
- Ensure you get at least the minimum, recommended intake of foods from the dairy food group (listed in the Table over leaf) – most Australians don't get enough and therefore miss out on dairy's health benefits.
- Select wholegrain rather than white/refined varieties of bread, pasta, noodles, breakfast cereals and rice.
- Fill your plate with a variety of types and colours of vegetables. Eat two serves of fruit a day.
- Consume fish at least twice a week.
- Eat less junk foods such as fried potatoes, cakes and muffins, alcoholic drinks, soft drinks and energy drinks and meat pies.

### Other tips for good cardiovascular health include:

- Exercise at moderate intensity, like brisk walking, for at least 30 minutes on all or most days.
- Limit your alcohol intake.
- Avoid smoking.
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Research shows including 3 to 4 serves of milk, cheese and yoghurt in a reduced-kilojoule diet can actually help accelerate weight and fat loss, and shrink waist lines.

### IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR HEALTH AND RISK FACTORS FOR CVD, TALK TO YOUR HEALTH PROFESSIONAL.

#### WITH A WIDE VARIETY OF DAIRY FOODS AVAILABLE, ENJOYING YOUR RECOMMENDED AMOUNT EVERY DAY IS EASY:

- Have a bowl of fruit and yoghurt for breakfast or after a workout.
- Grab a café latte on the way to work.
- Include cheese in a salad or sandwich.
- Try a yoghurt based dip like tzatziki with crackers and vegetable sticks.
- Dollop natural yoghurt on a jacket potato.
- Have a warm, milky drink in the evening.
- Use light cream cheese with milk as a creamy based sauce for pasta.
- Substitute a quarter of the stock for milk when making risotto for a creamier result.
- Make a sauce for grilled meats by mixing equal quantities of tomato relish or fruit chutney with natural yoghurt.
- Add a generous splash of milk to creamy vegetable soups.

For recipes and ideas on how to include adequate serves of dairy foods in your healthy eating plan visit [dairy.com.au/health](http://dairy.com.au/health).