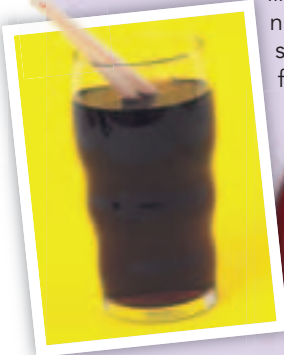




Dear Nikki

I have read that there is the same amount of sugar in an apple as there is in cola soft drinks. Does that mean fruit isn't good for me?

Fruit is better for you! When comparing these two products gram for gram, they may look the same but remember, we don't consume apples and cola in 100g portions. We eat the foods either whole (apples) or in a serving size (a can of cola). A standard apple weighs 130g and contains about 13g of sugar whereas a 355ml can of cola has nearly 40g of sugar. Fruit, such as apples, also has vitamins, minerals and fibre to keep us feeling full. Processed foods and sweetened drinks like cola have less nutritional value and should not replace fruit in your diet.



Dear Nikki

I have been told that eating nuts is good for me but I have also read that they are high in fat. Are they OK to eat and if so, how often can I eat them and how many?

Nuts may be high in fat but research shows that eating 30g of nuts daily, or at least four or five times a week, does not cause weight gain and can reduce the risk of heart disease by up to 50 per cent. Nuts have unsaturated fat and will lower blood cholesterol levels. Nuts also have other valuable benefits such as vitamin E, magnesium, potassium and fibre. Thirty grams of nuts equals six walnuts (high in omega-3) or 17 peanuts or 25 almonds.



Do you need Nikki's help?

Do you have a health-related question to ask Nikki? Write to: Hart to heart, c/- New Idea, PO Box 1467, Auckland or email: newidea@pacificmags.co.nz

5 WAYS TO:

Lower cholesterol

Soy protein

Soy protein, found in tofu and soy milk, can lower 'bad' cholesterol – low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol – by up to eight per cent. However, you have to consume 25-50g per day. Try to replace some animal products, which are high in saturated fat, with soy. Try your smoothie with soy milk or make a stir-fry with tofu, not meat.



Oats/oatbran

Oats/oatbran has soluble fibre which reduces the body's absorption of cholesterol from the gut. Eating 1½ cups of cooked oatmeal or oat-based cereal daily has cholesterol-lowering benefits. About 5-10g of soluble fibre a day decreases LDL cholesterol by 5 per cent.

Fish

Fatty fish such as salmon, sardines, fresh tuna – not canned – and mackerel are very high in omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3 reduces triglycerides in the blood, lowers blood pressure and reduces blood clotting. It is recommended that approximately 170g of fish is eaten twice a week.



Walnuts

Walnuts are rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs), which help reduce blood cholesterol and keep blood vessels healthier and more elastic. About 30g of nuts daily or at least four to five times a week is considered protective.



Plant sterols

Plant sterols help block the absorption of cholesterol in the gut. You will find plant sterols in margarines designed to help reduce LDL cholesterol levels.