



Functional Foods

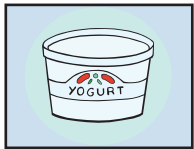
What are functional foods?

Functional foods are foods that have health-promoting benefits over and above their basic nutritional value.

If you take a look in any supermarket, you'll see that they are packed with functional foods, but how do they work, what are their health benefits and what does all the jargon mean? This fact sheet gives you the low-down.

Probiotic foods

These foods contain large numbers of naturally occurring live bacteria, such as *Lactobacillus sp*, *Bifidobacterium sp* and *Lactococcus sp*. These bacteria are often known as 'good bacteria', and it is thought that they help to maintain a healthy digestive system and may also help to strengthen your immune system.



You will also find 'live' or 'active' yogurts on supermarket shelves. These products contain live bacteria but they do not

always claim to contain any probiotic bacteria. Probiotics can be found in some yogurts and yogurt drinks, such as Yakult, Actimel, Müller Vitality and Healthy Balance range, Petit Filous Plus and Danone Activia®. These probiotic foods can be eaten at anytime of the day and many people take them as part of their breakfast routine. There is no recommended dose for these products, however the usual consumption is one portion per day, and they are suitable for adults and children.

At present, there is only limited scientific evidence to suggest that healthy people will benefit from a regular intake of probiotics, however many people report feeling better after taking them.

Prebiotic foods

Prebiotics are carbohydrates that cannot be broken down by your digestive system. The main types are inulin and fructo-oligosaccharides (FOS). They occur naturally in some foods such as chicory, artichoke, leeks, onions and asparagus. Prebiotics help feed the good bacteria already in your digestive system. They can improve the health of your digestive system and some scientists think that they may help to strengthen your immune system.

You will find a number of foods containing prebiotics on your supermarket shelves such as Rice Krispies Muddles, Warburton's Healthy Inside bread and Müller Vitality yogurts and yogurt drinks. There is no recommended dose for these products and they can be eaten by adults and children.*

There is a growing body of evidence on the health benefits of prebiotics, however further research is required to confirm the actual amounts that are needed for optimal health.

Plant sterols and stanols

Plant sterols and stanols are clinically proven to reduce the absorption of cholesterol from the gut, resulting in a lowering of bad (LDL) cholesterol.

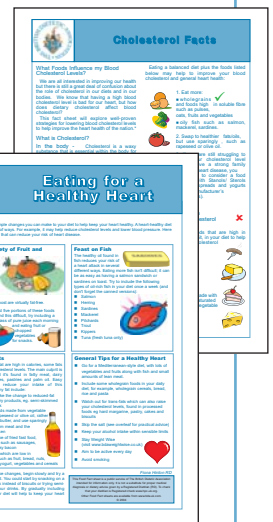
Lowering bad (LDL) cholesterol can help to keep your heart healthy.

Plant sterols are found naturally in very small amounts in fruits, vegetables, vegetable oils, grains, nuts and seeds. Stanols occur in even smaller amounts in many of the same foods.

If you want to lower your cholesterol level through a healthy diet and lifestyle, and/or have a strong family history of heart disease, you may want to consider a food enriched with stanols/sterols such as Benecol®, Danone Danacol, Minicol and Flora pro.activ. To obtain optimal cholesterol lowering benefits, you should follow the manufacturer's instructions on recommended daily amounts.

However, aiming to be a healthy shape and weight, being physically active and following a healthy, balanced diet are also important and can influence your blood cholesterol in a beneficial way.

These products can be used by anyone following a cholesterol-lowering diet. However, such diets including plant sterols and stanols are not usually recommended for children under the age of five or for pregnant or breastfeeding women. See the BDA fact sheets 'Cholesterol Facts' and 'Eating for a healthy heart' for more details.



*These products not recommended for people taking immunosuppressant or antibiotic drugs, people who are immunocompromised or who have short bowel syndrome.

Dairy peptides

Dairy peptides are small proteins made from milk, research has shown that they can help to control blood pressure by working with the body's natural mechanism for controlling blood pressure. They are found naturally in some cheeses such as Dutch Gouda and mature cheddar, but the amounts are too small to be useful.

AmealPeptide™ are special dairy peptides that are added to some dairy drinks, such as Flora pro.activ blood pressure mini drink, which taken daily can help to control blood pressure as part of a healthy diet. Dairy peptides only lower blood pressure when it is above normal and are intended for use by people who have been give diet and lifestyle advice to control their blood pressure.

They are not intended as a replacement for blood pressure medications. Dairy peptides are a new innovation in the dietary management of blood pressure and further research is underway to confirm their role in controlling blood pressure.

Omega-3 enriched foods

Eating a diet rich in omega-3 (or n-3) fats can help keep you healthy. Omega-3 fats are a type of polyunsaturated fats, which are obtained mainly from two sources - plants and fish.

Plant omega-3

Name: Alpha-Linolenic Acid (ALA).

Dietary Sources: Green leafy vegetables, walnuts, linseeds, rapeseed, walnut, and soya oils

(Did you know pure vegetable oil, available in most supermarkets, is often rapeseed oil?)

Long chain omega-3

Name: Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA)

Dietary Sources: Oily fish such as sardines, mackerel, salmon and herring.

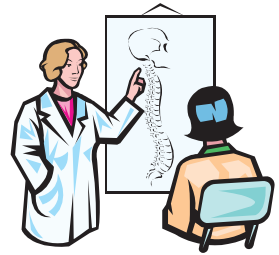
Also found in some meats such as lamb or beef, and butter made from animals fed on grass

You can also buy omega-3 fish oil supplements. Choose fish body oils or omega-3 supplements rather than cod liver oils.

Our bodies use plant omega-3 (ALA) to make EPA and DHA, but because this process is not always very efficient, it is best to include the fish sources of omega-3 in our diets too.

Health benefits of omega-3 fats:

- Protect against heart disease and stroke
- Vital for the healthy development of a baby's brain and eyes during pregnancy and the first 6-12 months of life
- May reduce stiffness and pain in the joints of rheumatoid arthritis sufferers
- May enhance concentration and learning in a very small number of children



The current recommendation is that we should all eat 450mg (0.45g) of omega-3 fats per day, known as the recommended daily intake (RDI). This is equivalent to eating two portions of fish per week, one of which should be oily. There are now many foods available that have omega-3 fats added to them.

For example St. Ivel Advance milk, Müller Vitality yogurts and yogurt drinks, IQ3 Brainstorm cereal bars, with added EPA and DHA, and Columbus Eggs which contain plant omega-3. Incorporating omega-3 fats into everyday foods allows people who do not eat enough oily fish or who do not like fish, to obtain the health benefits of these fats. The amounts of omega-3 fats in each of the products varies, so check on the label to find out how much of the product you need to eat or drink to meet the RDI. The benefits of omega-3 fats are optimised when intakes of trans fats are reduced (see the BDA fact sheet on trans fats).

Summary

In many cases, functional foods are expensive and for some of them it is actually possible to get the beneficial ingredients more cheaply from a healthy diet.

Nevertheless, functional foods are convenient for today's busy lifestyles and some can actually bring about health benefits - but remember that functional foods should be included as part of a healthy diet and lifestyle, and never as a substitute for one.

You should not use a functional food as a replacement for a prescribed medication and you should never stop taking a prescribed medication without seeking advice from your GP, pharmacist or practice nurse.

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