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CARDIOVASCULAR RISK

A healthy heart: blood pressure, cholesterol and uric acid

High blood pressure, high cholesterol and high uric acid increase the risk of heart attack, stroke and kidney disease. The good news: the same diet and lifestyle help with all three.

✅ The most important things

- **Salt < 5 g/day** (one level teaspoon, including salt in bread and foods).
- **Mediterranean-style eating**: vegetables, fruit, pulses, fish and olive oil.
- **Don't smoke** — the single measure that lowers risk the most.
- **Take your medicines every day**, even when your numbers are "good".

🎯 Your targets

Factor	Target	How to get there
🩺 Blood pressure	120–129 / 70–79*	Measure at home: 2 readings in the morning and 2 in the evening, for 3 to 7 days before your appointment, seated after 5 min rest. *Target if well tolerated; yours may differ.
🧈 LDL cholesterol	By your risk	Your target depends on your risk (e.g. < 55, < 70 or < 100 mg/dL). Diet helps, but medication is often needed.
💎 Uric acid	Individual	If you have gout and take medication, the target is < 6 mg/dL. Without symptoms, it is usually managed with diet and lifestyle.
⚖️ Weight and waist	BMI 20–25	Waist: men < 94 cm, women < 80 cm. If you are overweight, losing weight lowers blood pressure, cholesterol and uric acid.

🚦 Food traffic lights

● Choose

- Vegetables and fruit every day (≥ 200 g of each: soup, salad, 2–3 pieces of fruit)
- Fish 1–2 times a week, especially oily fish: sardines, mackerel (cavala), horse mackerel (carapau), salmon
- Pulses: beans, chickpeas, lentils, peas
- Wholegrain bread and cereals, oats (more fibre)
- Extra virgin olive oil as your main fat
- Unsalted nuts: 30 g a day (a closed handful)
- Low-fat dairy; water as your drink

● In moderation

- Red meat: no more than 350–500 g a week
- Eggs and cheese (a little, preferably fresh cheese)
- White bread, rice and pasta (choose wholegrain)
- Shellfish: in moderation, especially if you have high uric acid or gout
- Wine: < 100 g of alcohol a week — the less the better
- Salt cod (bacalhau): well soaked

● Avoid / rarely

- Cured and smoked meats (enchidos), sliced ham and processed meats
- Fizzy drinks, carton juices and nectars (sugar and fructose)
- Pastries, cakes, biscuits, traditional convent sweets (doces conventuais)
- Butter, cream, lard, fried food; "hydrogenated vegetable fat"
- Packet crisps, salty snacks, stock cubes
- Offal (liver, kidney, gizzards) and too much beer/spirits
- Liquorice (sweets, teas) — raises blood pressure

📞 Get help if…

- Chest pain, sudden breathlessness → call 112
- Face drooping, arm weakness or difficulty speaking → 112
- BP ≥ 180/110 mmHg with severe headache or blurred vision
- Sudden pain and swelling in a joint (e.g. big toe)
- Severe muscle pain or dark urine while on a statin
- Dizziness or fainting with blood pressure medicines

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🔄 Easy swaps

INSTEAD OF…	CHOOSE…
✗ Butter on bread	✓ A drizzle of olive oil and tomato, or fresh cheese
✗ Salt cod with cream (bacalhau com natas)	✓ Oven-baked salt cod with crushed potatoes (batata a murro) and olive oil
✗ Steak and chips	✓ Grilled fish or chicken with vegetables and boiled potatoes
✗ Custard tart (pastel de nata) as a snack	✓ Fruit + low-fat plain yoghurt or unsalted nuts
✗ Fizzy drink or carton juice	✓ Water, plain sparkling water, unsweetened tea

💊 Medicines and products: take care!

🚫 **Anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs)** — ibuprofen, diclofenac…: raise blood pressure and affect the kidneys. Only on medical advice.

🍬 **Liquorice** (sweets, teas): raises blood pressure and lowers potassium.

🌿 **"Cholesterol" supplements** (e.g. red yeast rice): do not replace prescribed medicines. Talk to your doctor before taking them.

❤️ **Low-dose aspirin** prescribed for your heart: don't stop it because of uric acid.

⏰ **Blood pressure and cholesterol medicines**: take them every day, even when your numbers are normal.

🤧 **Cold and flu remedies, nasal decongestants** with pseudoephedrine or phenylephrine: can raise blood pressure. Ask the pharmacist for an alternative.

🧂 **Potassium-enriched salt** (25% potassium): may help lower blood pressure, but **do not use it** if you have kidney disease or take potassium-retaining medicines — ask first.

💧 **Diuretics** (e.g. hydrochlorothiazide, furosemide) can raise uric acid. Don't stop them: your doctor can adjust.

💊 **Vitamin C tablets** are not recommended to lower uric acid.

🏃 Lifestyle

🚭 Smoking
Quitting greatly reduces risk. Ask for help at a stop-smoking clinic.

🍷 Alcohol
< 100 g a week (≈ 8 small glasses of wine); ideally none. Beer and spirits raise uric acid.

🚶 Exercise
150–300 min a week of moderate activity (walking, swimming, cycling) + strength exercises 2 days a week.

⚖️ Weight
A stable, healthy weight; waist within target. Losing weight lowers BP and uric acid.

🧂 Salt
< 5 g a day. Taste before seasoning; use herbs, garlic and lemon.

🥬 Potassium
More fruit, vegetables and pulses lower blood pressure — unless you have kidney disease or high potassium.

🩺 Checking BP
Use a validated upper-arm monitor; record your readings and bring them along.

🥤 Drinks
Water as your main drink; avoid sugary drinks (they raise weight and uric acid).

🧪 Tests
Cholesterol, blood sugar, uric acid and kidney function as advised.

🍽️ A Mediterranean day — example

Breakfast	Lunch	Snack	Dinner	Each week
Wholegrain bread with tomato and a drizzle of olive oil; low-fat yoghurt; fruit	Vegetable soup; roast sardines or mackerel with potatoes and salad; orange	A small handful of unsalted walnuts or almonds; apple	Chickpea salad with tuna in water, onion, pepper and parsley; fruit	Oily fish (sardines, mackerel) at least once; pulses and vegetables every day

References (sources of these recommendations):

1. 2024 ESC Guidelines for the management of elevated blood pressure and hypertension. Eur Heart J. 2024;45:3912–4018.
2. 2019 ESC/EAS Guidelines for the management of dyslipidaemias. Eur Heart J. 2020;41:111–188 (and 2025 ESC/EAS Focused Update).
3. 2021 ESC Guidelines on cardiovascular disease prevention in clinical practice. Eur Heart J. 2021;42:3227–3337.
4. Richette P et al. 2016 updated EULAR evidence-based recommendations for the management of gout. Ann Rheum Dis. 2017;76:29–42.
5. FitzGerald JD et al. 2020 American College of Rheumatology Guideline for the Management of Gout. Arthritis Care Res. 2020;72:744–760.
6. KDIGO 2024 Clinical Practice Guideline for the Evaluation and Management of CKD. Kidney Int. 2024;105(4S):S117–S314.
7. Direção-Geral da Saúde (Portuguese Directorate-General of Health) – PNPAS: Food Wheel and salt reduction recommendations (≤ 5 g/day, WHO).

This leaflet is for information only and does not replace individual advice from your doctor or dietitian. Targets should be personalised. Do not change or stop any medicine without talking to your doctor.