



DR.
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● A PATIENT GUIDE FROM YOUR CARDIOLOGIST

The Portfolio Diet

& Your Cholesterol

A plant-based way of eating that combines five proven foods to lower your LDL cholesterol — and works alongside, not instead of, your heart medication.



01 Why this guide matters to you

If you have raised cholesterol — or are working to prevent heart disease — what you eat can move your numbers more than most people expect. The **Portfolio Diet** was designed by doctors and dietitians at the University of Toronto to do one job especially well: lower your **LDL ("bad") cholesterol**. It isn't a fad or a crash diet. It's a generous, **plant-based** way of eating that brings together five specific foods — soy and pulses, viscous fibre, nuts, plant sterols, and plant oils — each chosen because it nudges cholesterol down through a different route.

"Patients often think the only way to lower cholesterol is a tablet. The Portfolio Diet shows how much food can add on top — and it's built to work with your statin, not as a reason to stop it. We assemble a "portfolio" of foods, and the effects stack up.

— DR. RAVI ASSOMULL, CONSULTANT CARDIOLOGIST

The numbers you should know

~30%

LOWER LDL CHOLESTEROL UNDER
OPTIMAL TRIAL CONDITIONS

~28%

LOWER HS-CRP, A MARKER OF
VASCULAR INFLAMMATION

~14%

LOWER CARDIOVASCULAR RISK IN
LARGE COHORT STUDIES

Sources: Jenkins et al. randomised trial (JAMA, 2003); Chiavaroli et al. systematic review & meta-analysis (Progress in Cardiovascular Diseases, 2018); Glenn et al. prospective cohorts (Circulation, 2021)

What you'll get from this guide

- An explanation of what the Portfolio Diet is, and the five food groups that do the heavy lifting for your cholesterol.
- A clear daily plate and serving guide, plus a straight-talking section on how the diet works **alongside** cholesterol-lowering medication.
- A fully worked example day showing where the five foods — and the calories — come from, plus an affordable **7-day starter plan** of simple meals.
- Simple swaps, a shopping steer, and honest answers to the questions patients and colleagues ask me most.

★ HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

Read it once cover to cover, then keep the plate guide and 7-day plan on your fridge. You don't need to be perfect — and you don't need all five foods on day one. Add one at a time. Steady, mostly-Portfolio eating is what lowers your cholesterol over months and years.

02 What is the Portfolio Diet?

It isn't a single "miracle food" — it's a **portfolio**. Just as an investor spreads money across several holdings, this diet spreads its cholesterol-lowering effect across five food groups that each work a different way. Eaten together, day after day, their small individual effects add up to a large one. Nothing is forbidden, very little is weighed, and the foods are ordinary supermarket items.

Plant sterols · 2 g

Nuts & seeds · 45 g

Viscous fibre · 20 g

Plant protein · ~45 g

Plant oils replace saturated fat

The five-part portfolio — each food group adds to the effect.

The five core foods

- **Plant protein** — soy foods (tofu, edamame, soy milk) and pulses (lentils, chickpeas, beans), in place of fatty meat.
- **Viscous (soluble) fibre** — oats, barley, psyllium, aubergine and okra.
- **Nuts & seeds** — a daily handful of almonds, walnuts or pistachios.
- **Plant sterols** — from fortified spreads, yoghurts or a supplement, about 2 g a day.
- **Plant oils** — extra-virgin olive or rapeseed oil in place of butter and lard.
- **Plenty of vegetables & fruit** — apples, oranges and berries also add fibre.



WHAT YOU'LL NATURALLY EAT LESS OF

Because the plate fills up with plants, pulses, wholegrains and good oils, there's simply less room for the things that raise LDL — red and processed meat, butter and fatty dairy, and ultra-processed food high in saturated fat. You cut back without feeling deprived.

⚠ IT'S A PORTFOLIO, NOT A SINGLE "SUPERFOOD"

No one ingredient does the work — not oats alone, not nuts alone. The benefit comes from combining all five foods consistently, in place of a saturated-fat-rich Western diet. Used together they behave a little like a low-dose cholesterol tablet on a plate.

03 Why it protects your heart

The Portfolio Diet doesn't rely on one magic mechanism — it lowers LDL cholesterol through several routes at once and calms the inflammation that drives plaque. Because LDL cholesterol is one of the genuine *causes* of heart disease, pulling it down — by diet, by medication, or by both — lowers your long-term risk.



Lower cholesterol, healthier arteries

The gold lines are your coronary arteries — the vessels that feed the heart muscle. Cholesterol-rich plaque (in red) narrows them over years and can rupture to cause a heart attack. By lowering circulating LDL, the Portfolio Diet slows that build-up and keeps the artery lining smoother — meaning fewer of the blockages behind angina, heart attacks and heart failure.

The four main ways it helps



1. Less cholesterol absorbed

Plant sterols compete with cholesterol in the gut, blocking some of it from being absorbed into the blood at all.



2. More cholesterol cleared

Viscous fibre binds bile acids in the gut; the liver makes new bile from blood cholesterol, pulling LDL out of circulation.



3. Less saturated fat in

Soy, pulses, nuts and plant oils replace red meat and butter — so less of the saturated fat that pushes LDL up in the first place.



4. Calmer inflammation

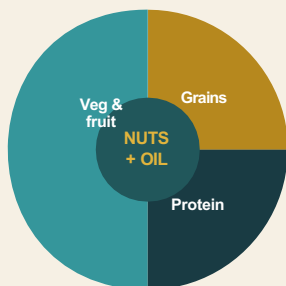
Nuts, soy and a plant-rich pattern lower hs-CRP — a marker of the vascular inflammation that helps plaque grow and rupture.

♥ THE GOOD NEWS

In the original randomised trial, following all five components closely lowered LDL cholesterol by around **28–30%** in a month — a drop comparable to starting a low-dose statin (lovastatin 20 mg). In everyday life, with realistic adherence, pooled trials show a more modest but still worthwhile **13–17%** fall in LDL. Add it on top of a statin and the two effects combine. It is rarely too late to benefit.

04 What a day looks like

You don't have to weigh anything. The simplest guide is your plate: make **half** vegetables and fruit, **quarter** wholegrains — ideally oats or barley — and **a quarter** plant protein from soy or pulses, with a daily handful of nuts, plant oil as your fat, and a sterol-fortified food once a day.



*Half plants · ¼ grains · ¼
plant protein*

Daily & weekly targets

A realistic target for most adults. The four “active” components – protein, fibre, nuts and sterols – are the ones to keep an eye on; the rest is simply good plant-based eating.

Plant protein (soy & pulses)	~45 g protein/day	Tofu, edamame, soy milk, lentils, chickpeas, beans
Viscous (soluble) fibre	~20 g a day	Oats, barley, psyllium, aubergine, okra, apples, oranges
Nuts & seeds	~45 g a day	A handful — unsalted almonds, walnuts, pistachios
Plant sterols	2 g a day	Fortified spread or yoghurt mini drink; or a supplement
Plant oils	Your main fat	Extra-virgin olive or rapeseed oil in place of butter
Vegetables	Fill half the plate	Fresh or frozen — more colour is better
Fruit	2–3 a day	Apples, oranges, berries, pears (fibre-rich choices)
Wholegrains	3–6 a day	Oats and barley first; wholewheat, brown rice
Red & processed meat, butter	Limit	Small amounts, now and then — these raise LDL

◆ TO DRINK

Water is your main drink, and fortified **soy milk** doubles as both a drink and a source of plant protein. If you drink alcohol, keep it to no more than 14 units a week with alcohol-free days — and if you don't drink, there's no heart reason to start.

05 How it works with your statin

This is the part patients — and my colleagues — ask about most, so let me be plain. The Portfolio Diet was never designed to *replace* cholesterol medication. It was designed to **add** to it. Diet and statins lower LDL by different routes, so their effects largely stack rather than overlap. The goal is a lower LDL by whatever combination gets you there safely.

~28%

LDL LOWERING FROM THE DIET AT
BEST ADHERENCE

~45%

LDL LOWERING WHEN THE DIET IS
ADDED TO A LOW-DOSE STATIN

LDL

THE CAUSAL DRIVER EVERY
APPROACH IS AIMING AT

Illustrative figures combining trial-level diet effects with typical low-intensity statin response; individual results vary. Decisions about medication are always your clinician's, not this booklet's

How to think about the numbers

- **Statin do the heavy, reliable lifting.** If your cardiologist has prescribed one for your level of risk, the diet is a powerful partner — not a substitute, and not a reason to stop.
- **The diet adds a meaningful extra drop.** Stacking a 15–30% dietary fall on top of a statin can take some people from "not quite at target" to "at target."
- **It does more than cholesterol.** Weight, blood pressure, blood sugar and inflammation all tend to improve — benefits a tablet alone doesn't deliver.

★ WHY "ADDITIVE" MATTERS

Because LDL cholesterol causes atherosclerosis in a dose-dependent way, lower is generally better across the range. Adding the diet to medication usually moves you further down — rather than swapping one tool for another.

A WORD ON CALORIES

Most adults need around 2,000 kcal (women) or 2,500 kcal (men) a day; the menus here sit near 1,900. The diet works on quality, not arithmetic — but losing excess weight lowers cholesterol and blood pressure further.

Over the page: a full example day showing where the five foods and the calories come from — followed by a week of meals you can start tomorrow.

06 One Portfolio day, costed

A real day's eating of about **1,900 kcal** that hits all five targets — ~45 g plant protein, ~20 g viscous fibre, ~45 g nuts, 2 g plant sterols and plant oil as the fat. Use it as a template and adjust portions to your own appetite.

Breakfast

≈ 410 kcal

50 g porridge oats made with 250 ml soy milk	310
15 g chopped walnuts	100
80 g berries + 1 tsp psyllium husk stirred in	40

Snacks & dessert

≈ 340 kcal

20 g almonds + 10 g pistachios	190
1 apple	70
125 g sterol-fortified soy yoghurt (≈2 g sterols)	80

Lunch

≈ 540 kcal

Barley & lentil salad (150 g cooked lentils)	300
Roasted aubergine & okra, 150 g	80
1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil + lemon	120
1 orange	60

DID THE DAY HIT THE TARGETS?

Plant protein ≈ 45 g (soy milk, lentils, tofu, soy yoghurt) · Viscous fibre ≈ 20 g (oats, psyllium, barley, aubergine, okra, apple, orange) · Nuts ≈ 45 g · Plant sterols ≈ 2 g · Plant oil ≈ 2 tbsp.

Dinner

≈ 610 kcal

150 g firm tofu, stir-fried	230
180 g cooked pearl barley	220
200 g mixed vegetables in 1 tsp olive oil	130
Garlic, ginger & low-salt soy seasoning	30

Daily total

≈ 1,900 kcal

Calorie figures are approximate and rounded, for guidance only. The day is fully plant-based, but you don't have to be – small portion of oily fish in place of the tofu still fits the pattern

07 Your 7-day Portfolio plate

A week of simple, affordable meals — most take under 25 minutes, and every day works in soy or pulses, oats or barley, a handful of nuts and a sterol-fortified food. Swap items for what's in season, on offer, or already in your fridge. Each day lands around 1,900 kcal.

DAY	BREAKFAST	LUNCH	DINNER
Monday	Porridge with soy milk, walnuts & berries	Barley & lentil salad with olive oil	Tofu stir-fry with mixed veg & barley
Tuesday	Overnight oats, soy yoghurt, almonds & pear	Chickpea, aubergine & tomato wholegrain wrap	Bean & vegetable chilli with brown rice
Wednesday	Oats with soy milk, ground flaxseed & apple	Lentil & barley soup with wholegrain bread	Baked tofu, roasted okra & sweet potato
Thursday	Soy yoghurt with oats, berries & pistachios	Hummus, falafel & big salad in wholemeal pitta	Edamame & vegetable noodle stir-fry
Friday	Porridge with soy milk, psyllium & banana	White bean, rocket & roasted pepper salad	Aubergine & chickpea tagine with barley couscous
Saturday	Wholegrain toast, sterol spread & avocado	Minestrone with cannellini beans & barley	Tofu & vegetable curry with brown rice
Sunday	Oats, soy milk, walnuts, apple & cinnamon	Lentil dhal with okra & wholegrain flatbread	Slow-cooked bean & vegetable stew with bread

For families & tight budgets

- **Tins and dried are the backbone.** Lentils, chickpeas and beans are cheap, keep for months, and build dozens of Portfolio meals.
- **Oats and barley are pennies a portion** — and they're two of the strongest viscous-fibre foods you can buy.
- **Batch-cook once, eat three times.** A pot of lentil-barley soup or bean chilli on Sunday becomes lunch and a midweek dinner.
- **Buy nuts in larger bags** and weigh a daily handful — far cheaper than small snack packs, and you control the salt



08 Simple swaps to get started

You don't need to change everything at once — in fact, the best advice is to add **one pillar every week or two**.

Start with one or two of these one-for-one swaps; each nudges your LDL cholesterol in the right direction, and they quickly become habit.

SWAP OUT

Butter & spreads

SWAP IN

Sterol-fortified spread

SWAP OUT

Red & processed meat

SWAP IN

Tofu, beans & lentils

SWAP OUT

Dairy milk

SWAP IN

Fortified soy milk

SWAP OUT

Sugary breakfast cereal

SWAP IN

Oats + psyllium + fruit

SWAP OUT

Cheese on everything

SWAP IN

Hummus & bean dips

SWAP OUT

Lard, ghee & palm oil

SWAP IN

Olive & rapeseed oil

SWAP OUT

Crisps & biscuits

SWAP IN

Almonds, walnuts & fruit

SWAP OUT

White bread & rice

SWAP IN

Barley & wholegrains

Shop like a Portfolio cook

- Build the trolley from the **edges** — produce, pulses, dairy-free aisle — before the centre.
- Pick up sterol-fortified spread or yogurt drink — the easiest way to hit the 2 g sterol target.
- Keep a stocked cupboard: oats, pearl barley, psyllium, tinned pulses, nuts.
- Buy vegetables and fruit frozen as well as fresh, so you never run out.



START WITH JUST ONE

If a full overhaul feels like too much, change one thing this week: swap your breakfast for oats with soy milk and a handful of nuts. Add the next pillar when that feels normal. Adherence beats intensity over a lifetime.

09 What patients ask me most

Q. Can I use this instead of my statin?

No — please don't stop a prescribed statin on the strength of this diet. The Portfolio Diet is designed to work *with* medication, adding to its effect. If your cholesterol and risk improve, your clinician may review your treatment — but that's a decision to make together, not alone.

Q. Isn't this just "going vegan"?

It's plant-*based*, not necessarily plant-*only*. The five components happen to be plant foods, but you can still eat some fish, eggs or lean meat around them. What matters is replacing saturated fat from red meat and butter with these cholesterol-lowering foods.

Q. Isn't soy bad for you — the hormone worry?

This is a common myth. The plant oestrogens in soy are weak and act very differently from human hormones. Large reviews find soy foods are safe for men and women, including after breast cancer, and they actively help lower LDL cholesterol. Whole soy foods — tofu, edamame, soy milk — are the forms to choose.

Q. Won't all those nuts make me put on weight?

It's a fair worry, as nuts are calorie dense. But in the trials, a daily handful eaten *in place of* other snacks didn't cause weight gain — nuts are filling, and some of their fat isn't fully absorbed. Weigh a portion rather than grazing from the bag.

Q. Do I really need psyllium and sterol-fortified foods?

They make the targets much easier to hit. Reaching 20 g of viscous fibre from food alone is hard, so a spoon of psyllium helps; and 2 g of plant sterols realistically needs a fortified spread, yoghurt drink or supplement. They're optional, but they're what turns a "good" effect into a strong one.

Q. Is the evidence really as strong as for the Mediterranean diet?

Let me be straight, because it's a fair challenge. The strongest Portfolio evidence is from randomised trials measuring *cholesterol and inflammation*, where the effect is large and consistent. Evidence for fewer heart attacks comes mainly from large observational cohorts, which can't prove cause on their own. But because lowering LDL is itself proven to cut events, the chain of reasoning is sound — and the diet is safe and nutritious regardless.

⚠ IMPORTANT IF YOU TAKE MEDICATION OR HAVE OTHER CONDITIONS

If you take a statin, ezetimibe or other lipid therapy, keep taking it unless your clinician advises otherwise. Plant sterols are not recommended in the rare condition *sitosterolaemia*. If you have kidney disease, diabetes, or take any regular medication, check with your GP, cardiologist or dietitian before making big dietary changes.

10 Five things to take away

If you remember nothing else, remember these five. Pin them to the fridge and share them with whoever shops and cooks in your home.

1 It's built to lower your cholesterol

Around 13–17% lower LDL in everyday use, and up to ~30% under ideal conditions — comparable to a low-dose statin. Strong, consistent trial evidence.

2 Five foods working together

Soy and pulses, viscous fibre, nuts, plant sterols and plant oils. No single food is magic — the portfolio is.

3 Additive, not alternative

It's designed to sit alongside your medication and amplify it — never as a reason to stop a prescribed statin on your own.

4 Add one pillar at a time

Start with oats and soy, add nuts, then fibre and sterols. Adherence over months beats a perfect week you can't sustain.

5 Consistency, not perfection

Mostly-Portfolio, most days, for months — that's what changes your cholesterol and your arteries. It is never too late to start.

⚠ IMPORTANT — PLEASE READ

This booklet is general health information and is not a substitute for personalised medical advice. Decisions about your medication, diet and treatment should be made together with your GP, cardiologist or a registered dietitian — especially if you take lipid-lowering, blood-pressure or diabetes medication, or have kidney disease, diabetes or sitosterolaemia. Do not stop or change prescribed medication on your own. If you experience chest pain, breathlessness, palpitations or sudden weakness, seek medical help immediately.



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