



fighting heart disease  
and stroke  
european heart network



## Changes to European food and drink policies could reduce burden of heart disease and stroke by 50%

Dietary risks are responsible for around half of the death and disability caused by cardiovascular disease (CVD) in Europe<sup>i</sup>, where this devastating disease remains the leading cause of death for men and women, and where 85 million people live with it.<sup>ii</sup>

On this World Heart Day, the European Heart Network (EHN) publishes a new paper calling for sweeping measures to transform European food policies.

EHN's paper<sup>iii</sup> *Transforming European food and drink policies for cardiovascular health* shows that the evidence establishing links between diet and CVD has strengthened since its most recent paper on diet and physical activity was published in 2011.

Careful unpicking of two apparent 'controversies', relating to salt and saturated fat, reveals that there is still robust evidence for the advice to limit salt consumption and to replace saturated fat with unsaturated fats or fibre-rich complex carbohydrates.

A cardiovascular health-promoting diet means a shift from an animal-based diet to a more plant-based diet. It includes vegetables, fruit and berries in abundance. Whole-grain products, nuts and seeds, fish, pulses, and low-fat dairy products are also important, as are non-tropical vegetable oils in modest amounts. This everyday dietary pattern limits consumption of red meat, processed meat products and foods or drinks with low content of vitamins, minerals and dietary fibre and/or a high content of free sugars, saturated/trans fats or salt.

Every European, irrespective of the place or socio-economic circumstances into which they are born, should be able to live free from avoidable, diet-related CVD. The paper calls for rapid and full implementation of a package of recommendations in order to achieve this vision. Recommendations include: policies to tackle cardiovascular health inequalities; supply-side policies (e.g. agricultural policy) and demand-side policies (e.g. food labelling); as well as food composition policies (e.g. mandatory maximum levels of trans fats).

Susanne Løgstrup, Director of the EHN says:

*"In a perfect world, people would buy and eat the food that is recommended in dietary guidelines, and markets would respond to consumer demand. But we do not live in a perfect world. Many other forces drive the food supply in today's complex food systems. Major economic and policy drivers determine what food is produced, what is imported and how foods are marketed. Global and external factors are well beyond the reach of individual governments – let alone individuals.*

*However, there are different points along the food chain where policymakers can take action to improve diets. Such action has great potential to prevent avoidable diet-related death and disease caused by CVD and may help address the associated financial burden, estimated to cost the EU economy a steep €102 billion annually."*

Read EHN's new paper here: <http://www.ehnheart.org/publications-and-papers/publications.html>

**Note to editors:**

### **About the European Heart Network (EHN)**

EHN is a Brussels-based alliance of heart foundations and like-minded non-governmental organisations throughout Europe, with member organisations in 25 countries. It plays a leading role in the prevention and reduction of cardiovascular diseases, in particular heart disease and stroke, through advocacy, networking, capacity-building and patient support, so that they are no longer a major cause of premature death and disability throughout Europe. [www.ehnheart.org](http://www.ehnheart.org)

For further information, contact Susanne Løgstrup, Director of the European Heart Network, Brussels, Tel +32 2 512 91 74 or email: [slogstrup@ehnheart.org](mailto:slogstrup@ehnheart.org)

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<sup>i</sup> Data from the Global Burden of Disease database (2015) <https://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-compare/>.

<sup>ii</sup> Wilkins E, Wilson L, Wickramasinghe K, Bhatnagar P, Leal J, Luengo-Fernandez R, Burns R, Rayner M, Townsend N (2017). [European Cardiovascular Disease Statistics 2017](#). European Heart Network, Brussels

<sup>iii</sup> EHN's fifth paper dedicated to diet and its impact on CVD