

Healthy Eating Tips to Help Lower Your Cholesterol



Too much cholesterol in your blood can lead to problems, such as blocked arteries. This can lead to heart attack and stroke. Eating meals that are low in saturated fat and cholesterol helps reduce the level of cholesterol in your blood. Below are eating tips to help you do this.

There are 2 main kinds of cholesterol in your blood:

- **HDL (good) cholesterol.** This kind prevents fat deposits (plaque) from building up in your arteries. In this way, it protects against heart disease and stroke.
- **LDL (bad) cholesterol.** This kind stays in your body and sticks to artery walls. Over time, it may block blood flow to the heart and brain. This can cause a heart attack or stroke.

The cholesterol in your blood comes from 2 sources. It comes in food that you eat. And it's also made by your liver. Your body needs some cholesterol. But too much can cause problems. Limiting the amount of certain fats can help. Your body makes more cholesterol when your diet is high in bad fats.

Understanding the fats you eat

There are 3 kinds of fats in foods and drinks:

- **Unsaturated fats.** These include monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. These are healthy fats. They raise the level of good cholesterol and lower the level of bad cholesterol. Good fats are found in vegetable oils. This includes olive, sunflower, corn, and soybean oils. Good fats are also in fish, nuts, and seeds.
- **Saturated fats.** These are unhealthy fats. These raise your risk of disease. They lower your good cholesterol. They raise your bad cholesterol. Saturated fats are found in animal products. This includes high-fat cuts of meat, beef, pork, poultry with wings, whole-milk, full-fat dairy products, butter, beef fat (tallow), and ice cream. Some plant-based foods are high in saturated fats. This includes coconut, coconut oil, cocoa butter, and palm oil.
- **Trans fats.** These are unhealthy fats. They lower your good cholesterol and raise your bad cholesterol. The main source of trans fats is processed food. These foods have partially hydrogenated oils. These are fats made by turning a liquid fat into a solid fat at room temperature. Trans fats are found in hard (stick) margarines. They are in many fast foods, processed foods, and baked goods. Soft margarine sold in tubs has fewer trans fats. The FDA says that trans fats are no longer considered safe in foods and has banned them from being added to processed foods.

Creating a cholesterol-lowering diet

The tips below will help you create healthy eating habits to lower your blood cholesterol level:

- Talk with your healthcare provider before starting a new diet.
- Read nutrition labels. Learn what healthy portion sizes look like.
- When cooking, use unsaturated vegetable or plant oils. These include sunflower, corn, soybean, canola, peanut, avocado, and olive oils.
- Limit saturated fats. These are in animal products, such as meat and whole-milk dairy foods. Poultry skin also has this type of fat. Plants high in saturated fats include coconut oil, palm oil, and palm kernel oil.
- Eat more meatless meals. If you eat meat, eat smaller portions. Choose lean cuts. This includes round, chuck, sirloin, or loin.

- Replace meat with fish at least 2 times a week. Fish is a good source of omega-3 fatty acids. This is a type of unsaturated fat. This fat may lower the risk of heart disease. Prepare fish baked, broiled, grilled, or boiled rather than breaded and fried. Choose fatty fish, such as salmon, tuna, trout, sardines, mackerel, and herring.
- Replace whole-milk dairy products with low-fat or nonfat products. Try soy products. Soy helps to reduce total cholesterol.
- Eat more fiber. Try soluble fiber, such as oat bran. These lower total cholesterol.
- Eat plant-based foods, such as avocados, olives, nuts, such as almonds, walnuts, pecans, and hazelnuts, seeds, such as chia seeds, hemp seeds, and ground flaxseeds, and whole grains, such as oat bran, whole and rolled oats, and barley. These foods lower both cholesterol and triglyceride levels. Triglycerides are another type of fat in the blood.
- Limit the amount of white rice or white bread you consume. Try eating brown rice, quinoa, whole-grain breads, and whole-grain pasta instead.
- Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables daily.
- Limit fast foods, commercially fried foods, and baked goods, such as pastries, pie crust, cookies, and crackers. Assume they have saturated fat and trans fat.
- Look for processed foods made with nonhydrogenated oil rather than saturated fat or partially hydrogenated vegetable oils.

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