

Cholesterol Lowering guidelines

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a wax-like substance in the blood that is necessary to: Form cell membranes and hormones, insulate nerve and brain tissue and produce bile for digestion.

The amount of cholesterol that is made by the liver is sufficient to stay healthy – the body does not require additional cholesterol from saturated fats and cholesterol-containing foods! The more fat you eat, the more cholesterol your liver makes.

How does cholesterol affect my heart?

If there is too much cholesterol circulating in the blood stream, fatty deposits containing cholesterol are deposited on the inside of the artery walls. This causes narrowing of the arteries and obstruction of blood flow to the heart muscle, resulting in a heart attack.

Who should have their cholesterol tested?

Most people with high cholesterol feel perfectly healthy and usually don't have symptoms or warning signs of high levels. The best way to tell if you have high cholesterol is to have it tested.

What is good and bad cholesterol?

- LDL-cholesterol is known as the “bad” cholesterol. LDL brings cholesterol to the body’s cells from the liver. The cells take the cholesterol they need and the excess cholesterol remains in the blood. LDL-cholesterol is “bad” cholesterol because it builds up in the arteries causing the gradual narrowing of the blood vessels.
- HDL-cholesterol is “good” cholesterol as it takes excess cholesterol the body does not need back to the liver where it is broken down and removed from the body. It also helps to remove some of the cholesterol, which has already been deposited in the artery walls.

How can I improve my diet to lower my cholesterol level?

1. Eat less fat and eat less cholesterol.

Which fats are the healthiest?

Food contains 2 types of fat. Food with saturated fats (bad)) and food with unsaturated fats (good). Another way to classify it is the saturated fats are usually from animals and the unsaturated fats are from plants.

Foods high in saturated fats are:	Foods high in unsaturated fats are:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meat pies • Sausages and fatty cuts of meat • Butter • Cream • Cakes and biscuits • Egg yolk • Organ meats • Fatty meats • Some seafood – shrimps, prawns, calamari 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oily fish – mackerel and salmon • Nuts – almonds, cashews • Seeds – sunflower and pumpkin seeds • Avocados • Plant/Vegetable oils and spreads – rapeseed vegetable oil, sunflower, olive, corn, walnut oil

Eating foods that contain unsaturated fat instead of saturated fat can actually help reduce cholesterol levels.

Saturated fats can also raise cholesterol levels and are naturally found in small amounts of animal products, including meat, milk and dairy foods.

Reducing total fat in your diet can also help reduce your risk of heart disease. So instead of roasting or frying your food, consider grilling, steaming, poaching and boiling your food.

2. Fibre and cholesterol:

Some high-fibre foods can help lower your cholesterol. Your diet should include a mix of sources of soluble fibre. Good sources of fibre include:

- Wholemeal bread, bran and wholegrain cereals (All bran flakes, high fibre bran, Wheat bix)
- Fruits – apples, oranges, strawberries, apricots, dates, raisins, plums (better to take off the skin)
- Vegetables – brussels sprouts, broccoli, spinach, cabbage
- Potatoes and sweet potatoes with their skins on
- Oats
- Beans, peas and lentils
- Nuts and seeds

3. Use but don't abuse alcohol

Moderate use of alcohol may increase your HDL cholesterol. Too much alcohol however, can raise LDL levels. Daily consumption of alcohol should be limited to 1 serving per day for women and 2 servings per day for men (1 serving = 120ml wine or 25ml spirits or 340ml beer).

4. Eat a variety of foods that provides enough nutrients necessary for good health

What else can I do to keep my heart healthy?

1. An active lifestyle can also help lower your cholesterol level. Walking, cycling, running... 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity every week can improve your cholesterol levels and your blood pressure. Moderate aerobic activity means you're working hard enough to raise your heart rate and break a sweat (one way to feel whether you're exercising at a moderate intensity is if you can still talk, but you can't sing the words of a song).
2. Watch your weight
3. Stop smoking
4. Reduce stress
5. Reduce salt intake
6. Get regular check ups

What to read on food labels?

1. Ingredients: Spot unhealthy fats (hydrogenated oils, coconut oil, palm kernel oil, butter, cream). To keep fat intake low, select products that have no fat or a source of fat that appears toward the end of the list.
2. Nutrition information: Compare quantities of fat in different types of food products. Select products with 3-5g fat per 100g food. When choosing oils, margarines, mayonnaise and salad dressings this does not apply. If a product is labelled "light" or "lite", it may not mean low in fat. It might refer to salt, flavour or sugar. "Low cholesterol" may indicate a different type of fat is found in the food (i.e. vegetable fat) but may still contain a large amount of fat. Therefore check the total fat content and watch your portions.