

CHOLESTEROL

What is cholesterol?

A wax-like substance called cholesterol is found in the blood and is essential for the formation of hormones, cell membranes, and bile, which is used for digestion.

The liver produces enough cholesterol to keep the body healthy; it doesn't need to get any more from saturated fats or meals that contain cholesterol. Your liver produces more cholesterol when you eat more fat.

How does cholesterol affect my heart?

Cholesterol-containing fatty deposits are built up on the inside of artery walls when there is too much cholesterol in the bloodstream. This leads to a narrowing of the arteries and obstruction of blood supply to the heart, ultimately causing a heart attack.

Who should have their cholesterol tested?

Most people with high cholesterol feel healthy and often show no symptoms or warning signs of their levels being high. Test results are the most reliable indicator of high cholesterol.

What is good and bad cholesterol?

The "bad" cholesterol is referred to as LDL. LDL transports cholesterol from the liver to the body's cells. After the cells have taken whatever cholesterol they require, the extra cholesterol remains circulating in the bloodstream. LDL cholesterol is referred to as "bad" cholesterol because it collects in the arteries and gradually narrows the blood vessels. Saturated fat is associated with raised levels of LDL cholesterol, which can lead to blockages in your heart and other parts of your body. This harmful type of cholesterol also increases your risk for heart disease.

The "good" cholesterol, HDL, transports extra cholesterol that the body does not need back to the liver, where it is metabolized and eliminated from the body. Additionally, it assists in clearing out some of the cholesterol that has already built up in the artery walls.

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

1. Reduce your intake of cholesterol and fat.

Which fats are the healthiest?

UNSATURATED FATS: While providing our bodies with essential nutrients, these fats are considered 'good' fats as they help reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. Both polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats are considered to be healthy fats. Among other foods, these healthy fats can be found in fish, almonds, and olive oil.

VS

SATURATED FATS:

Foods containing saturated fats are generally unhealthy. These fats are considered 'bad' fats as they raise LDL and VLDL cholesterol. These are fats found in animal products (meat, dairy), as well as in processed foods (cookies, crackers, chips).

FOODS HIGH IN SATURATED FATS	FOODS LOW IN UNSATURATED FATS
Red Meat (beef, lamb etc)	Legumes (Beans, Peas & Lentils)
Pork/Bacon	Wholegrains (Oats, Barley, Couscous)
Sausages and/or Fatty Meats	Avocado
Processed Meats	Nuts (Walnuts & Almonds)
Creams & Ice cream	Fruits & Berries
Butter	Soybeans
Certain plant-based oils (for example, palm oil, palm kernel oil, coconut oil)	Fatty Fish (Especially Mackerel & Salmon)
Cream-based dressings, dips, mayonnaise	Avocado oil, Olive oil, Canola oil
Baked Goods (Biscuits, Cakes, Pastries, Brownies, Pies)	Chicken (with the skin off)
	Vegetables

Deep Fried Goods	Dark Chocolate (small amounts)
Fast Foods	Fresh Orange Juice
Desserts	Seeds (Sunflower & Pumpkin Seeds)

To minimize the amount of saturated fat you eat, always opt for the low- or fat-free version

In fact, eating meals with unsaturated fat rather than saturated fat can help lower cholesterol levels. In small amounts, animal products such as meat, milk, and dairy foods naturally contain saturated fats, which can also raise cholesterol levels.

Your risk of heart disease can also be decreased by reducing the total amount of fat in your diet. Consider grilling, steaming, poaching, or boiling your food as alternatives to roasting or frying it.

2. Increase the amount of fibre you eat.

Some foods with a high fibre content can help in lower cholesterol. A variety of soluble fibre should be included in your diet. Good sources include:

- Oats
- Legumes (Beans, peas and lentils)
- Whole grains (bran, wholegrain cereals e.g., Wheat Bix, All Bran Flakes, wholemeal bread)
- Fruits (apples, oranges, strawberries, apricots, dates, raisins, and plums)
- Nuts and seeds
- Brussel sprouts, broccoli, spinach, and cabbage are among the vegetables
- Cold potatoes and sweet potatoes with their skins

3. Eat a range of foods that are nutritious enough to maintain good health.

4. Drink alcohol responsibly.

Alcohol intake affects cholesterol levels differently depending on the level and frequency of intake. Current recommendations for moderate alcohol intake are one drink per day or less for females and two drinks per day or less for males.

Lifestyle changes - How to keep my heart healthy?

- Exercise regularly (preferably 30 min of moderate-intensity exercise every day).
- Maintain a healthy weight and BMI (Body Mass Index).
- Stop smoking.
- Eat less salt.
- Reduce your stress levels.
- Get a good night's sleep.
- Get regular check-ups.

Why Read Food Labels?

1. To Spot Unhealthy Fats or Hidden Salts in the Ingredients.
2. To Establish the Nutrition Information (or lack thereof).

Understanding what is in the foods you eat helps you make healthier choices.