

Controlling Your Cholesterol for Heart Health

High blood cholesterol plays a major role in the development heart disease. The higher your blood cholesterol level, the greater your risk, but there are steps you can take to lower your blood cholesterol and protect your health.

Cholesterol is a soft, waxy substance made by the liver and is in all your body's cells and nerves. Cholesterol plays an important role in body functions such as digestion and hormone production. However, too high a level of cholesterol can lead to heart disease, which can lead to a heart attack. In addition to cholesterol being made by your body, it is also found in animal foods that we eat. It is important to limit your intake of certain foods to help decrease your risk of developing heart disease. Read on to learn how to lower your cholesterol.

Kinds of Fats in Your Body

LDL (lousy cholesterol)—a thick, hard substance that can clog your blood vessels and can block blood flow to the heart and brain.

HDL (healthy cholesterol)—helps your body to get rid of excess cholesterol that LDL has left behind in the body

Triglycerides—fats carried in the blood from the food we eat. Triglycerides travel in the bloodstream to be used for energy or stored as body fat.

Know your numbers

A lipid profile is a fasting blood test that measures your cholesterol. Below are the general guidelines:

Total Cholesterol	200 mg/dl or less
LDL Cholesterol	130 mg/dl or less
HDL Cholesterol	40 mg/dl or above (60 mg/dl or above is ideal)
Triglycerides	150 mg/dl or less

General Guidelines to Help Lower Your Cholesterol

1. Choose a diet low in saturated fat, cholesterol and *trans* fats
 - Choose only the leanest cuts of meats and poultry
 - Trim all visible fat and remove poultry skin before cooking and eating
 - Choose low-fat dairy products such as skim milk and 1% milk. Limit cream and high fat cheese.
 - Use liquid vegetables oils such as olive oil, canola oil, peanut oil and sesame oil in place of margarine or butter

- Limit your intake of egg yolks to 2 per week
- Avoid *trans* fat by reading labels and partially hydrogenated oils in the ingredient list (found mainly in stick margarine, cookies, crackers, pies, donuts, French fries)
- Avoid deep frying foods. Choose healthier cooking methods—bake, broil, or grill.

2. Choose monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fat in place of other fats

- Monounsaturated fats are found in plant foods such as nuts, avocados, olive oil, canola oil, sesame and peanut oil. Choose dressings and margarine spreads that are higher in monounsaturated fats and low in saturated/trans fats.
- Polyunsaturated fats are found in plant foods as well and include some nuts, fatty fish, safflower, sunflower, corn, cottonseed and soybean oils. Be sure to watch portions of these fats.
- Add more omega-3 fats to your diet. Choose fatty fish 2 to 3 times per week such as salmon, tuna, mackerel and sardines. Eat more walnuts, canola oil and ground flaxseed.

3. Increase your intake of soluble fiber

- Soluble fiber is found in oats, bran, barley, beans and legumes, fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds.
- Aim for two to four servings of fruits each day. Choose more fruits with soluble fiber such as berries, oranges, apples and pears
- Aim for three to five servings of vegetables each day. Select most often fresh or frozen.
- Increase your intake of whole grains such as whole wheat breads and pastas, brown rice, whole grain cereals, beans and legumes. Aim to make at least have your grains whole. Avoid processed refined grains by avoiding “enriched” or “bleached” flours

4. Cut back on sugar

- Limit your intake of juice, sweets and other desserts. Choose more whole fruit instead of juice or as dessert
- Cut back on high sugar beverages such as soda or other sweetened beverages. Replace with water, or other calorie-free beverages

5. Limit Alcohol

- Talk to your doctor about whether or not you should be drinking alcohol. If you do drink, limit to no more than one drink a day for women and two per day for men
- Alcohol can promote weight gain, so if you need to lose weight, be careful about the calories you consume with alcohol.

6. Increase your physical activity

- Exercise can help you lose weight and can raise your HDL cholesterol. Include at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week
- Learn to add small amounts of activity to your day by taking the stairs instead of the escalator or elevator
- Park your car further away from your destination
- Take up a sport you enjoy
- Aim for 10,000 steps per day