

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a substance present in all of us. Our bodies make cholesterol. It's also present in meat and dairy foods. Plant foods don't have cholesterol. There are several types of cholesterol, including low-density lipoproteins (LDL) and high-density lipoproteins (HDL). LDL cholesterol is called "bad" cholesterol because it can build up on the inside of your arteries, causing them to become narrow. HDL is called "good" cholesterol because it protects your arteries from plaque buildup.

How does lowering LDL cholesterol help?

Lowering your LDL cholesterol level will help keep plaque from building up in your arteries. This makes it easier for your heart to get the blood and nutrients it needs. If you can reduce your LDL level to less than 130 and increase your HDL level to at least 50, you're on the right track. If you have heart disease or diabetes, your doctor will probably want you to lower your LDL level to at least 100. Usually this requires medicine.

What foods should I add to my diet?

When trying to lower your LDL cholesterol, you want to add foods that are low in saturated fat because your body turns saturated fats into cholesterol. To do this, add foods that are high in soluble fiber (*see column B following page*).

There are lots of ways to add healthy foods to your diet. Follow the tips and the serving-size guidelines below:

- Start your day out right. Have some form of grain (like whole-grain bread or whole-grain cereal) and fruit for breakfast.
- Think of vegetables and whole grains as your main dish in lunches and dinners. If you're serving meat or poultry as a main dish, add a tossed salad or a vegetable to the plate.
- Add beans to leafy salads, pasta salads and stews--chick peas, kidney beans and navy beans have been shown to reduce LDL cholesterol levels.
- Drink fat-free or 1 percent milk, not whole milk or 2 percent milk. Look for low-fat yogurt and cheese, too.
- Try soy products. Soy has come a long way in the last few years. Today, you can find soy products in many grocery stores and health food stores. Try veggie-soy burgers, soy pepperoni, tofu or soy milk.
- Serve raw or cooked fruits with low-fat yogurt for dessert.
- Use olive or canola oil for cooking. Both olive oil and canola oil are high in monounsaturated fat, which decreases LDL and total cholesterol levels. Avoid margarines, butter and oils high in polyunsaturated fats, such as corn and peanut oil.
- Eat only small amounts of sweets.
- Eat one to two servings of fish or seafood each week if you have coronary artery disease. People with coronary artery disease seem to benefit from eating fish and seafood.
- Cook with garlic. Several studies have shown that garlic reduces LDL cholesterol and lowers blood pressure.
- Eat moderate amounts of nuts that are rich in monounsaturated fat, like almonds, hazelnuts, pecans, cashews, walnuts and macadamia nuts. These nuts have been shown to improve cholesterol levels. Avoid eating nuts by the handful. Instead, garnish food with one tablespoon of chopped nuts per person.

What else can I do?

Besides changing your diet, you should talk to your doctor about an exercise program that's right for you. If you smoke, quit. If you're overweight, try to lose weight (changing your diet and exercising will help you lose weight). Talk with your doctor about reducing other risk factors, such as high blood pressure or diabetes.

What if changing my diet doesn't help?

Your body will need time to respond to changes in your diet. Your doctor will watch your progress. If your cholesterol level hasn't improved after three to six months, your doctor may prescribe medicine to lower your cholesterol. However, you'll still need to eat a healthy diet to help the medicine work.

A. Eat less of these foods:	B. Instead, eat more of these foods:
Vegetables cooked in butter, cheese or cream sauces	Fresh, frozen, baked or steamed fruits and vegetables
Potato chips, french fries and other "junk" foods	Whole-grain breads and pasta, brown rice, bagels
Fried foods	Steamed, baked or fresh foods
Whole milk	1 percent or fat-free milk
Bacon, sausage and organ meats (like liver)	Fish, skinless poultry, lean cuts of meat with fat trimmed away, soy products and dried beans
Egg yolks	Egg whites, egg substitutes
Cheesecake, pastries, doughnuts, ice cream	Small amounts of fig bars, air-popped popcorn, low-fat low-calorie frozen desserts (yogurt, sherbet, ice milk)
Butter and margarine	Olive oil or canola oil in moderation

For more information:

The American Heart Association

7272 Greenville Avenue
Dallas, Texas 75231
1-800-AHA-USA1
www.americanheart.org

Diet Tips for Children with High Cholesterol

www.familydoctor.org/handouts/495.html