

## Cholesterol - healthy eating tips

Cholesterol is a fatty substance produced naturally by your liver and found in your blood. You can also get cholesterol from some foods – this is called 'dietary cholesterol'. Dietary cholesterol is found only in animal products (such as offal, fatty meats, full fat dairy products and egg yolks).

Cholesterol is used for many different things in your body, but is a problem when there is too much of it in your blood.

Your total blood cholesterol level includes two types of blood cholesterol:

- **Low density lipoprotein (LDL)** is also known as 'bad' cholesterol because it can add to the build-up of plaque in your arteries and increase your risk of getting coronary heart disease.
- **High density lipoprotein (HDL)** is also known as 'good' cholesterol because it helps to protect you against coronary heart disease.

Most of the total cholesterol in your blood is made up of LDL cholesterol. Only a small part is made up of HDL cholesterol.

It's best to aim for a low LDL cholesterol level and a higher HDL cholesterol level.

### Triglycerides

In addition to cholesterol, your blood also contains a type of fat called triglycerides.

When you eat, your body converts any calories it doesn't need to use right away into triglycerides. Triglycerides are found in your blood and stored in your body's fat deposits. Hormones release triglycerides to make energy between meals.

Like cholesterol, your body needs triglycerides to work properly. However, there is evidence to suggest that some people with higher levels of blood triglycerides are at increased risk of coronary heart disease.

If you regularly eat more calories than you burn, you may have high triglycerides levels (hypertriglyceridaemia).

### Measuring high total blood cholesterol

Most people with a high total blood cholesterol level feel perfectly well and often have no symptoms. Therefore, the best way to find out if your total blood cholesterol level is high is to have a blood test. Ask your doctor for more information.

### Causes of high total blood cholesterol

There are various causes of high total blood cholesterol:

- **Saturated and trans fats**

High total blood cholesterol levels are mainly caused by eating foods high in saturated and trans fats.

Foods high in saturated fat include fatty meats, full fat dairy products, butter, coconut oil and palm oil, and most deep fried take-away foods and commercially baked products, such as pies, biscuits, buns and pastries.

Foods high in trans fat include most deep fried take-away foods and commercially baked products, such as pies, biscuits, buns and pastries.

Limiting your intake of foods such as cakes, pastries, pies and biscuits will not only lower your saturated fat intake but also your trans fat intake.

- **Cholesterol in food**

Cholesterol in food (dietary cholesterol) has only a small effect on LDL cholesterol. Saturated and trans fats in food cause a much greater increase in LDL cholesterol.

You can include some cholesterol-rich foods, such as offal (liver, pate and kidney) and prawns, as part of a healthy balanced diet low in saturated and trans fats. You can also eat up to six eggs a week as part of a healthy balanced diet low in saturated and trans fats without increasing your risk of coronary heart disease.

Ask your doctor or dietitian for more information.

- **Genetics**

Your genetics also affect your blood cholesterol levels. Some people will still have a high total blood cholesterol level even if they follow a healthy balanced diet low in saturated and trans fats. These people may need to take cholesterol-lowering medicine as prescribed by their doctor.

## Reducing high total blood cholesterol

Making lifestyle changes, in particular changing some of the foods you eat, is very important to help to reduce a high total cholesterol level or LDL cholesterol level.

One important change is to choose healthier monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, and reduce the amount of saturated and trans fats you eat.

You may also need to take cholesterol-lowering medicines, such as statins, to help you to manage your blood cholesterol levels and reduce your risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

Talk to your doctor to find out the most appropriate treatment for you.

## Healthy eating and cholesterol

You can help to lower a high total blood cholesterol level or LDL cholesterol level by changing some of the foods that you eat and following a healthy balanced diet low in saturated and trans fats.

It's important to replace foods that contain unhealthy saturated and trans fats with foods that contain polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. Foods high in polyunsaturated fats include margarine spreads and oils such as sunflower, soybean and safflower; oily fish; and some nuts and seeds. Foods high in monounsaturated fats include margarine spreads and oils such as olive, canola and peanut; avocados; and some nuts.

Healthy eating is about enjoying foods from a variety of different food groups. Below are some tips to help you manage your cholesterol levels.

- Use spreads and margarines made from canola, sunflower or olive oil, and dairy blends that have earned the Heart Foundation tick, instead of butter.
- Use a variety of oils for cooking – some suitable choices include canola, sunflower, soybean, olive, sesame and peanut oils.
- Use salad dressings and mayonnaise made from oils such as canola, sunflower, soybean, olive, sesame and peanut oils.

- Choose reduced, low or no fat milk, yoghurt, custard and desserts, or calcium added non-dairy food and drinks. Try to limit ice-cream to three times a week.
- Have two to three serves (150 grams) of oily fish every week. The fish may be fresh, frozen or canned.
- Select lean meat (meat trimmed of fat and poultry without skin).
- Try to limit processed meats, including sausages, and deli meats, such as salami.
- Snack on plain, unsalted nuts and fresh fruit (aim to eat two serves of fruit every day).
- Incorporate dried peas (such as split peas), dried beans (such as haricot beans, kidney beans), canned beans (such as baked beans, three bean mix) or lentils into at least two meals a week.
- Eat plenty of vegetables (aim for five serves of vegetables every day).
- Choose wholegrain breads, cereal, pasta, rice and noodles.
- Try to limit take-away foods, such as pastries, pies, pizza, hot chips, fried fish, hamburgers and creamy pasta dishes, to once a week.
- Try to limit salty, fatty and sugary snack foods, such as crisps, cakes, pastries, biscuits, lollies and chocolate, to once a week.
- Try to limit foods such as liver, kidneys and pate.
- Include two or three serves of plant sterol enriched foods every day (for example, plant sterol enriched margarine, yoghurt, milk and bread).
- Include up to six eggs every week.

Consuming foods low in refined carbohydrates and high in dietary fibre, particularly soluble fibre, can also reduce the level of LDL cholesterol in your blood. Foods containing soluble fibre include fruits, legumes (chickpeas, lentils, soybeans, four bean mix and baked beans) and cereals (oats and barley).

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- An accredited practising dietitian, Dietitians Association of Australia Tel. 1800 812 942
- Heart Foundation Health Information Tel. 1300 36 27 87
- Order a free copy of *Healthy eating and cholesterol* [brochure], by calling the Heart Foundation's Health Information Service on 1300 36 27 87.
- Order a free copy of *Cholesterol, triglycerides and coronary heart disease* [brochure], by calling the Heart Foundation's Health Information Service on 1300 36 27 87.

## Things to remember

- Limit your intake of saturated and trans fats.
- Replace saturated and trans fats with polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats.
- Enjoy a variety of foods everyday including vegetables; wholegrains; legumes; lean meats; oily fish; fruit; low, reduced or no fat dairy (or non-dairy) products; and vegetable and seed oils.
- Have your cholesterol and triglycerides levels checked by your doctor regularly.

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Heart Foundation

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