

CUTTING YOUR CHOLESTEROL: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

For decades health experts have been telling us which foods to avoid in order to lower cholesterol levels and heart disease risk. But over the past few years, research has shown that certain foods, when added to the diet, could also be of benefit.

How foods lower cholesterol

Soluble fiber, soy protein and plant sterols have all emerged as key players in lowering blood cholesterol levels, yet they all work in different ways.

- Soluble fibers work by binding up intestinal bile acids which would otherwise turn into cholesterol. Oatmeal, barley and legumes are great sources of soluble fiber.
- Soy protein slows production of cholesterol in the liver and speeds the rate at which the liver removes LDL or “bad” cholesterol from the body.
- Plant stanols and sterols work in the intestine to interfere with cholesterol absorption.

Cracking Open the Egg Myth

Still confused about how many eggs you’re allowed to eat? You’re probably not alone. The American Heart Association (AHA) calls for limiting dietary cholesterol to less than 300 milligrams per day (a single large egg contains about 186 milligrams of cholesterol). It is wise for anyone at risk for heart disease or who has a history of a heart attack to pay close attention to the amount of cholesterol in their diet. Keep in mind however, one large egg only has 78 calories, plus 6 grams of protein, Vitamin D, choline and the antioxidants lutein and zeaxanthin, which are important for eye health. According to the AHA, one egg (or two egg whites) per day can be a part of a healthy diet. A recent study found that up to one egg per day led to a lower risk of heart disease and stroke.

Note: Extensive research has shown that dietary cholesterol has only a small effect on blood cholesterol and that cutting back on trans fats and saturated fats are more important. Egg substitutes can be a handy option for people who want to eat eggs more frequently yet prefer to cut back or budget their daily cholesterol on other foods. Egg substitutes are a blend of real egg whites, a little vegetable oil, dried milk, vegetable gum or tofu to act as the yolk, coloring, and salt. Vitamins and minerals are often added. Some popular brands include Egg Beaters and Better’n Eggs.

Spice up your life

Besides the culinary benefits, some herbs and spices offer heart healthy benefits as well. *Rosemary* contains the phytonutrient carnosol which has been found to exhibit antioxidant and anti-inflammatory activity. Studies suggest that rosemary may guard against heart disease by preventing cholesterol oxidation. *Oregano*. Just one tablespoon of fresh oregano contains as much antioxidant activity as one medium apple. *Garlic*. Studies have shown that garlic may act as an antioxidant as well as prevent plaque formation.

Beyond Diet: What Else Affects Cholesterol?

Things you cannot change.

Age and Sex

Cholesterol levels rise with age in both men and women. Women have lower total cholesterol levels than men of the same age prior to reaching menopause.

Heredity

Elevated cholesterol levels can run in families. Your genes can determine the amount of cholesterol your body makes.

Things you can change.

Weight

Besides being a major risk factor for heart disease, being overweight can increase total cholesterol levels. Losing weight can result in several desirable changes including lowering LDL (“bad” cholesterol) and total cholesterol levels, lowering triglycerides and raising your HDL or “good” cholesterol.

Physical Activity

Not including physical activity in your lifestyle is a major risk factor for heart disease. Regular physical activity can help lower LDL (“bad”) cholesterol and triglycerides and raise HDL (“good”) cholesterol. It’s also a boost for losing those extra pounds. For cardiovascular fitness, vigorous exercise like tennis, jogging, biking and swimming is more effective than moderate exercise. Aim to be physically active for at least 30 minutes on most, if not all, days of the week. Check with your doctor before embarking on an exercise program.

Understanding Cholesterol Numbers

LDL Cholesterol	Less than 100	Optimal
	100-129	Near Optimal/Above Optimal
	139-159	Borderline High
	160-189	High
	>190	Very High
Total Cholesterol	<200	Desirable
	200-239	Borderline High
	>240	High
HDL Cholesterol	<40 (men) / <50 (women)	Low
	>60	High Optimal