



Understand Cholesterol and Boost Heart Health

Did you know that not all cholesterol is bad for you? Some types of cholesterol are essential for good health. Your body needs cholesterol to perform important jobs, such as making hormones and building cells.

Cholesterol travels through the blood on proteins called lipoproteins. Two types of lipoproteins carry cholesterol throughout the body:

- **LDL** (low-density lipoprotein), sometimes called “bad” cholesterol, makes up most of your body’s cholesterol. High levels of LDL cholesterol raise your risk of heart disease and stroke.
- **HDL** (high-density lipoprotein), or “good” cholesterol carries cholesterol back to the liver where it is flushed from the body. High levels of HDL cholesterol can lower your risk of heart disease and stroke.

When your body has too much LDL cholesterol, it can build up in the walls of your blood vessels. This build up is called plaque. As your blood vessels build up plaque over time, the insides of the vessels narrow. This narrowing can restrict and eventually block blood flow to and from your heart and other organs. When blood flow to the heart is blocked, it can cause angina or a heart attack.

Risk Factors

Factors that can increase your risk of bad cholesterol include:

- **Poor diet.** Foods that are high in saturated fat and/ or trans fat both contribute to increasing cholesterol. Saturated fat is contained within animal products and trans fats can be found in fried foods and baked foods such as cakes, cookies and pies.
- **Lack of exercise.** Physical exercise helps boost your body’s HDL, or “good”, cholesterol whilst increasing the size of the particles that make up LDL, or “bad”, cholesterol, which makes it less harmful.
- **Smoking.** Smoking cigarettes makes your LDL cholesterol ‘stickier’. As it gets stickier it clings to your artery walls and clogs them up.
- **Age.** Unfortunately, yet inevitably as we age our body’s chemistry changes. The older we get the less effective our liver becomes at removing LDL cholesterol leading to a higher risk of high cholesterol.
- **Diabetes.** High blood sugar contributes to higher levels of a dangerous cholesterol called very-low-density lipoprotein (VLDL) and lower HDL cholesterol. High blood sugar also damages the lining of your arteries.

Top tips to improve cholesterol balance

Cut back on saturated and trans fats found in foods such as: crisps, biscuits, red meat, cheese, butter, eggs, pastries, processed meat/foods.

Eat more omega 3 and unsaturated fats such as oily fish, unsalted nuts/seeds and olive oils. Adding more soluble fibre such as dark leafy greens, beans, lentils and oats is also beneficial.

Increase activity and aim for at least 150 minutes of moderately intense exercise per week such as brisk walking, cycling etc.

Five everyday foods that help regulate cholesterol levels

The secret to a healthy and sustainable diet is to regularly consume food and drink that have nutritional benefits and crucially, you enjoy. Here are five everyday foods that alongside a healthy, balanced diet can actively help to lower cholesterol and keep your heart healthy.

1. Nuts

Nuts are exceptionally nutrient-dense. Walnuts are a particularly good choice as they're rich in the plant variety of omega-3 fatty acids which is great for heart health. Eating a daily serving of nuts is linked to a 28% lower risk of both fatal and nonfatal heart disease.

2. Fish

Fatty fish, such as salmon and mackerel, are excellent sources of long-chain omega-3 fatty acids. Omega 3s bolster heart health by increasing "good" HDL cholesterol and lowering inflammation and stroke risk. Fish is a major part of the Mediterranean diet, which has been extensively studied for its benefits on heart health.

3. Whole grains

Extensive research ties whole grains to lower heart disease risk. In fact, a review of 45 studies linked eating three servings of whole grains daily to a 20% lower risk of heart disease and stroke. Oats contain beta-glucan, a type of soluble fibre that helps lower cholesterol. Eating oats may lower total cholesterol by 5% and "bad" LDL cholesterol by 7%.

4. Dark leafy greens

While all vegetables are good for your heart, dark leafy greens are particularly beneficial. Dark leafy greens, such as kale and spinach, contain lutein and other carotenoids, which are linked to a lower risk of heart disease. Dark leafy greens may also help lower cholesterol levels by binding to bile acids and making your body excrete more cholesterol.

5. Soy foods

Soybeans are a type of legume that may be beneficial for heart health. An analysis of 35 studies linked soy foods to reduced "bad" LDL and total cholesterol, as well as increased "good" HDL cholesterol. The effect seems strongest in people with existing high cholesterol.



Save the date –
October is National Cholesterol Month

National Cholesterol Month is dedicated to raising awareness of cholesterol and funds for Heart UK to help the fight against high cholesterol. Head over to their website to find out how you can get involved, raise awareness and make a difference.

Food of the month

When you find yourself craving a salty snack between meals, try swapping crisps for some plain or lightly seasoned popcorn. Popcorn typically contains more fibre than crisps, is lower in fat and contains less calories!

Fact of the month A reason to smile

did you know that laughing can increase blood flow by 20%?

Tip of the month

Make sure that you regularly get between 7-9 hours of sleep each day. Not only does sleep allow your body the time it needs to rest, repair and rebuild, but it does the same for your mind too. As you sleep, your brain begins to organise and process all the information you've taken in during the day. It converts your short-term memories into long-term memories.

Quote of the month The first wealth is health. – Ralph Waldo Emerson