

## A Lifestyle Recipe to Lower your Cholesterol



A heart-healthy eating plan can help you manage your blood cholesterol level and reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. This section will discuss what cholesterol is, what those numbers mean and simple dietary tips to help improve your cholesterol levels by reducing excess saturated fat and trans fat.

### *What is Cholesterol?*

Cholesterol is a fatty substance found in your blood and it's produced naturally in the liver. Your body needs it to stay healthy as it helps to build cells, make hormones and produce bile acids to digest fat. But too much cholesterol can pose a problem. Foods that cause your liver to make more cholesterol than it would otherwise come from saturated and trans fat (e.g. meat, poultry and full-fat dairy products). Some tropical oils such as palm oil and coconut oil can also trigger your liver to make more cholesterol - these oils are often found in baked goods.<sup>1</sup>

### **Cholesterol Breakdown**

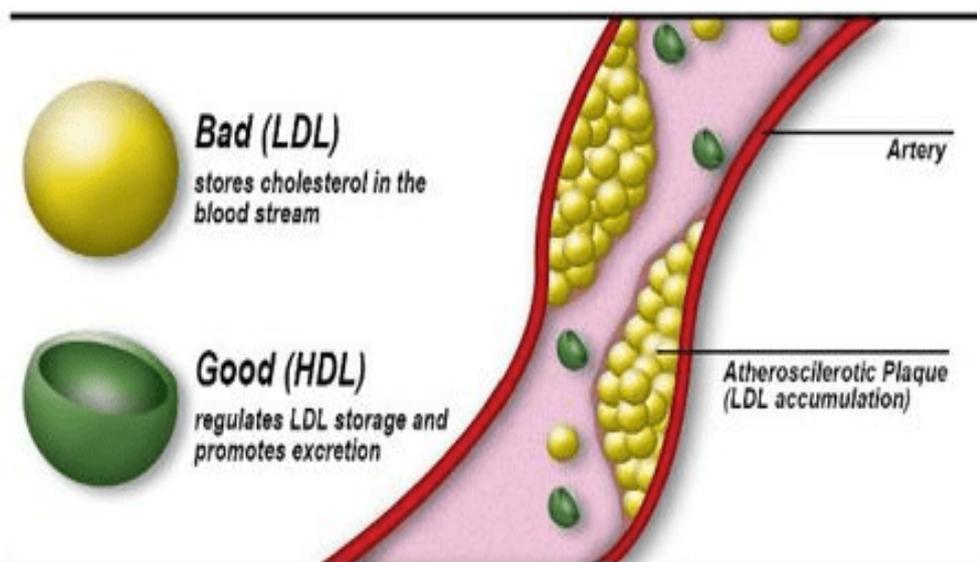
There are two main types of cholesterol, one good and the other bad. Cholesterol is carried in your blood by proteins. When cholesterol and proteins combine, they're called lipoproteins.

**'Good' Cholesterol:** High-density lipoprotein (HDL) acts like a taxi and carries away the 'bad' cholesterol that you don't need back to the liver where it is broken down and passed out of

your body. Although only about one-third of LDL is carried away, the HDL is considered to be heart protective. Studies show that a 1.0 increase in HDL causes a 15% decrease in heart disease.

**'Bad' Cholesterol:** Low-density lipoproteins (LDL) contributes to fatty build-ups in arteries (atherosclerosis) - this can narrow the arteries and make them less flexible. If a blood clot forms and blocks one of these narrowed arteries, a heart attack or stroke can result.

**Triglycerides:** Our blood also contains a type of fat called triglycerides. This is stored in the body's fat cells. Being very overweight, eating a lot of fatty and sugary foods or drinking too much alcohol can make you more likely to have a high triglyceride level. Triglycerides can also contribute to the narrowing of the artery walls, increasing your heart disease risk.



## Know Your Numbers

Cholesterol	Targets
<b>Total Cholesterol</b>	<4mmol/L
<b>HDL Cholesterol</b>	>1mmol/L
<b>LDL Cholesterol</b>	<2mmol/L <i>General</i> <1.8mmol/L <i>*High Risk</i>
<b>Triglycerides</b>	<2mmol/L

*\*High Risk* refers to those known to have heart disease, stroke, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, familial hypercholesterolaemia (total cholesterol >7.5 mmol/L) or blood pressure  $\geq 180/110$  mmHg - based on guideline recommendations from The *Royal Australian College of General Practitioners* (RACGP).<sup>2</sup>

If you're diagnosed with high cholesterol, your overall health and known risks (such as smoking or high pressure) will help guide treatment. The good news is that high cholesterol can be lowered, reducing the risk of heart disease and stroke. Often, changing behaviours will go a long way toward bringing your numbers into line. If lifestyle changes alone don't improve your cholesterol levels, medications may be prescribed.



## *Eating a Heart-Healthy Diet*



From a dietary standpoint, the best way to lower your cholesterol is to reduce saturated fat and trans fat. Reducing these fats means limiting your intake of red meat and full-fat dairy products made. It also means limiting fried food and cooking with healthy oils, such as vegetable oil. A heart-healthy diet emphasises fruits, vegetables, whole grains, poultry, fish and nuts, while curbing sugary foods and beverages. Eating this way also helps to increase your fiber intake which not only supports digestive health but also lowers levels of cholesterol by as much as 10 percent. Here are some more helpful tips to lower cholesterol:<sup>1</sup>

- Opt for low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) milk and low-fat, low-sodium cottage cheese, part-skim milk mozzarella (or ricotta) cheese in recipes.
- Bake, steam, boil, grill, poach, stew or roast instead of frying. If frying, try cooking with water using a non-stick frying pan.
- Replace butter and tropical oils such as coconut oil with vegetable oils such as canola, safflower, sunflower, soybean and olive oil and limit to a teaspoon.
- Choose to eat 2-3 serves of fish per week, particularly oily fish (e.g. salmon, trout and herring) as they're rich in omega-3 fatty acids which can help lower both LDL cholesterol and triglycerides. Prepare fish baked, grilled or boiled rather than breaded and fried, and without added salt. Non-fried fish and shellfish, such as shrimp, crab and lobster, are low in saturated fat and are a healthy alternative to many cuts of meat and poultry.

- Try to have more meatless meals featuring vegetables or beans in the week such as eggplant lasagne or a big grilled portobello mushroom on a bun instead of a beef burger.
- Limit processed meats such as sausage, ham and salami. Many processed meats, even those with 'reduced fat' labels, are high in calories and saturated fat. Such foods are often high in sodium, too. Read food labels carefully and choose to eat processed meats only occasionally.
- Select lean cuts of meat with minimal visible fat and trim off all visible fat from meat before cooking. Lean beef cuts include the round, chuck, sirloin or loin. Lean pork cuts include the tenderloin or loin chop. Lean lamb cuts come from the leg, arm and loin.
- Opt for chicken and turkey rather than duck and goose, which are higher in fat and remove the skin before eating.
- Limit alcohol intake to no more than 2 standard drinks on any day.

### *Get Active*



Besides helping you lose weight, increasing physical activity can help lower your triglycerides, the most common type of fat in your body, while increasing your HDL levels. Benefits can be seen with as little as 60 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic exercise a week. <sup>3</sup>

## Quit Smoking

One of the best steps you can take towards improving your cholesterol is to quit smoking. Smoking makes it easier for the 'bad' cholesterol (LDL) to enter walls of the arteries, increasing heart disease risk and also lowers the 'good' cholesterol (HDL). Non-smokers should also avoid second-hand smoke as any tobacco exposure can increase their risk of developing heart disease by 25-30 percent.<sup>4</sup>



### Content Sources:

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2. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP). *The Red Book Cholesterol and other lipids*. Retrieved from: <https://www.racgp.org.au/clinical-resources/clinical-guidelines/key-racgp-guidelines/view-all-racgp-guidelines/red-book/prevention-of-vascular-and-metabolic-disease/cholesterol-and-other-lipids>.
3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 1996.
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