



Five tips to lower your cholesterol

Did you know there's such a thing as good and bad cholesterol? Good cholesterol (HDL) can help prevent heart disease and carry cholesterol away from arteries. However, bad cholesterol (LDL) can cause fatty build-ups in artery walls and raise your risk for heart disease or a stroke. To help lower your LDL cholesterol, it's important to eat lots of fruits and veggies, exercise regularly and keep a healthy weight. Use these five simple tips to lower your LDL cholesterol:

TIP #1: Think about adding plant sterols and stanols to your diet.



Plant sterols and stanols are similar to cholesterol and found naturally in many fruits, veggies, whole grains, legumes and nuts. They help lower LDL cholesterol. Food companies have started adding them in larger amounts to their products. For example, you can find them in some trans-fat free margarines, orange juices and cereals. You may want to swap butter for a sterol-fortified margarine (like Benecol). Eating these foods on a regular basis along with plenty of fruits, veggies, whole grains and low-fat dairy products will help lower your risk of having heart disease.

TIP #2: Have less saturated fats and trans-fats.



Eating foods that are high in saturated fats and trans-fats can increase LDL or "bad" cholesterol. Try to cut back on foods high in saturated fat such as butter, whole milk dairy products, fatty cuts of beef and pork (like bacon), and tropical oils. Trans-fats, which are also known as "partially hydrogenated oils," raise LDL and triglycerides and lower HDL, the "good" cholesterol. Avoid or limit the amount of trans-fats in your diet. Look for products with "0" grams of trans-fat and no partially hydrogenated oils in the nutrition facts label.

TIP #3: Have more unsaturated fats from fish, oils and nuts.



Fatty fish (like salmon and tuna), flaxseed and walnuts are all good sources of omega-3 fatty acids (a polyunsaturated fat). Omega-3s can lower LDL and triglyceride levels. Olive oil, avocados and certain nuts (like almonds, peanuts and pistachios) are good sources of monounsaturated fatty acids. Foods that are high in monounsaturated fat can improve LDL cholesterol and overall heart health.

TIP #4: Eat less refined grain products and skip sugary drinks.



Eating too many refined grain products (white bread, white rice, bagels, etc.) and sugary drinks (soda, juice, sports drinks, etc.) can increase triglycerides and the risk for heart disease. Switch to whole grains which are also high in cholesterol-lowering fiber and have water or unsweetened drinks.

TIP #5: Eat more soluble fiber-rich foods.



Having 5 to 10 grams or more of soluble fiber a day can reduce LDL and total cholesterol. Examples of foods that are good sources of soluble fiber include oatmeal, oat bran, beans, apples, prunes, strawberries and citrus fruits.

