

High-Cholesterol Foods

Written by [WebMD Editorial Contributors](#)

Reviewed by [James Beckerman, MD, FACC](#) on November 18, 2022

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that's found in all of your cells. It is produced by your liver, helps keep your cells from breaking down, and is involved in the production of hormones and vitamins. Additional cholesterol in your body comes from consuming animal-based foods. There is zero cholesterol in plants.

[Cholesterol](#) comes in two major forms: [LDL](#) (low-density lipoprotein), or "bad" cholesterol, and HDL (high-density lipoprotein), or "good" cholesterol.

Consuming some cholesterol in your diet can be perfectly safe, but because your body makes all the cholesterol you need, it's not necessary to consume any through the foods you eat. Experts recommended that you consume as little dietary cholesterol as possible.

Why You Should Avoid Cholesterol

Cholesterol circulates throughout the bloodstream, and too much of it can have negative effects on your body, especially your heart. High levels of "bad" cholesterol can raise your risk of [heart disease](#) or [stroke](#).

When you have too much LDL cholesterol in your system, it can form plaque, which is a buildup on the walls of the blood vessels. This buildup narrows the blood vessels, which blocks the healthy flow of blood in the body and can potentially cause a heart attack or other problems. For this reason, experts recommend consuming less than 300 milligrams of dietary cholesterol per day.

Foods With (Lots of) Cholesterol

1. Egg Yolks

Eggs are frequently considered one of the worst sources of dietary cholesterol. A single egg contains about 186 milligrams of cholesterol, which is more than half of the maximum daily recommended intake. All of that cholesterol is found in the yolk-- none in the white of the egg.

2. Cheese

Cheese is another big offender when it comes to cholesterol. A single slice of Monterey Jack cheese, or 21 grams, contains 18.7 milligrams of cholesterol. While a little cheese in your diet won't hurt, it can quickly add up to a major source of dietary cholesterol.

3. Shrimp

Despite being a low-fat food, shrimp are surprisingly high in cholesterol. A single 4-ounce serving of shrimp has 170 milligrams of cholesterol. That's more than half of your recommended daily intake.

4. Organ Meats

Organ meats such as liver are known to be rich in vitamins and nutrients. While this makes them an excellent part of many diets, they aren't a great choice for people trying to reduce their cholesterol. A 3-ounce serving of beef liver, for example, contains 333 milligrams of cholesterol.

5. Sardines

Similar to shrimp, sardines are a potent seafood source of cholesterol. An ounce of sardines contains as much as 40 milligrams of cholesterol, and it's easy to eat more than an ounce at a time.

6. Fast Food

Fast food tends to be high in fried fats and almost always involves some sort of animal product, which can make it bad for your cholesterol levels. Studies have shown that regularly eating at fast-food restaurants leads to an increase in cholesterol and may even lower "good" cholesterol.

Cholesterol-Free Alternatives

1. Egg Whites

Egg whites are cholesterol-free and can be used to replace whole eggs in many recipes.

2. Low-Fat Cheese

Low-fat cheeses tend to be lower in cholesterol than full-fat cheeses.

3. White Meats

Instead of dark meats like beef and pork, look to options like chicken instead. Even if you eat the skin, chicken breast has less than a quarter of the cholesterol per serving compared with beef liver.

4. Water-Packed Tuna

Tuna is lower in cholesterol than sardines, especially when packed in water rather than oil. An ounce of water-packed tuna contains only 10.2 milligrams of cholesterol.

5. Baked Foods

Fast food is often fried in hydrogenated oils, which are high in [trans fats](#) and can raise LDL cholesterol levels. Baked foods do not add any fats or oils and may therefore be lower in cholesterol.

6. Beans

If you want a protein boost without the cholesterol, beans are naturally cholesterol-free. Beans are also linked to lower levels of blood cholesterol in general.