



Improving your Cholesterol levels



Your heart is the most important muscle in your body. Each day it beats approximately 100,000 times to pump life-giving blood to every organ of your body via a maze of arteries and veins. But, if one of these arteries becomes blocked with cholesterol a heart attack or stroke can occur.

Hypercholesterolaemia occurs when there are high levels of cholesterol in the blood. A small amount of cholesterol is essential for our bodies, but high amounts are dangerous for our health. High levels of cholesterol can cause a build-up of fatty deposits inside the blood vessels. The blood vessels can eventually become blocked leading to a heart attack or stroke.

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a type of fat produced by the liver that our bodies need to perform important functions such as making hormones and bile. There are two types of cholesterol: low density lipoproteins (LDL) and high density lipoproteins (HDL).

LDL cholesterol

LDL cholesterol is also known as the 'bad' or 'lousy' cholesterol as it is the fat that causes the fatty deposits that block the blood vessels.

HDL cholesterol

HDL cholesterol is also known as the 'good' or 'happy' cholesterol as it helps protect against heart disease by clearing away LDL cholesterol build up from the blood vessels.

Checking cholesterol levels

When a doctor requests a blood test to check your cholesterol, the results will include an amount for 'total cholesterol' which is the combined amount of LDL and HDL cholesterol present in your blood. The individual amounts of LDL and HDL will also be included in the results. A low level of LDL cholesterol and a high level of HDL cholesterol will help decrease your risk of heart disease.

Risk factors for hypercholesterolaemia

The risk factors for hypercholesterolaemia include:

- A family history of high cholesterol
- Being overweight
- Excessive consumption of foods containing high amounts of saturated fats
- Getting older

How is hypercholesterolemia treated?

In addition to any medications your doctor may provide, the best way to treat hypercholesterolaemia is by making dietary changes. These dietary changes will help you to improve your cholesterol profile.



High cholesterol levels are one of the leading causes of heart attacks and strokes, alongside high blood pressure, being overweight and high triglyceride levels



70% of people globally don't consume the omega 3 that they require for a healthy heart



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Genetics can be a cause of high cholesterol levels

Limit saturated fats

Saturated fats or 'bad fats' as they are often known increase the production of LDL (bad) cholesterol. Saturated fats are found in processed foods such as

- cakes
- biscuits
- chips

and in high fat animal foods such as:

- butter
- cream
- cheese and
- fatty meats.

Limit trans fats

Trans fat is another type of 'bad' fat. It is even more dangerous than saturated fats because in addition to increasing your LDL (bad) cholesterol, it also decreases your HDL (good) cholesterol. Trans fats are predominantly found in foods which have undergone processing such as hydrogenation. Foods that are deep fried and pastries commonly contain trans fats.

Increase your intake of good fats

Conversely, it is essential to consume an adequate intake of good fats such as monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. These good fats increase the production of HDL (good) cholesterol and increase the size of LDL (bad) cholesterol so that it doesn't stick to the arteries as easily.

Furthermore, omega 3 polyunsaturated fats provide an anti-inflammatory effect which helps to reduce the build-up of plaque in the arteries. It is recommended that we consume 500mg of omega 3 per day to prevent heart disease, or 1000mg per day for those who have heart disease.

Plant Sterols

Plant sterols are substances found in all plants. They are mainly found in vegetable oils but also in small amounts in nuts, legumes, grains and cereals. Plant sterols can help lower cholesterol levels because they have a similar chemical structure to cholesterol and compete with cholesterol to be absorbed into the body, so less cholesterol is absorbed. It is recommended that people wanting to reduce their LDL cholesterol levels consume 2-3 grams of plant sterol enriched foods each day. Foods that can be enriched with plant sterols include margarine spread, low fat milk, breakfast cereal and low-fat yoghurt.



Fish is the best source of omega 3, but you may also need a fish oil supplement to help meet your requirements

To get personalised support, please make an appointment to see Katie Ireland, Accredited Practising Dietitian, contact details below.

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Try replacing two meals per week with foods rich in soy protein



Highest food sources of soluble fibre:

Black, Lima or kidney beans
Brussels Sprouts
Avocados
Flax seeds
Broccoli
Carrots
Pears
Stone fruit
Figs
Prunes
Oats/Porridge



Enjoy up to 6 eggs per week

Have a diet rich in soluble fibre and beta-glucan

Soluble fibre is found mainly in plant cells. Good sources of soluble fibre include:

- fruits and vegetables,
- dried beans,
- peas,
- lentils,
- oat bran,
- barley,
- seed husks,
- flaxseed,
- psyllium and
- soy products.

Beta-glucan is a type of soluble fibre found in large amounts in oat and barley. Beta-glucan helps lower the amount of LDL cholesterol in the body. Cholesterol enters the small intestine from the food we eat but mainly from bile produced by the liver. Normally that cholesterol is reabsorbed into the blood and back to the liver. Beta-glucan stops the cholesterol being reabsorbed by binding to it and removing it out of the body through the bowel.

Include some soy protein

Soy protein is rich in a compound called isoflavones which has been shown to reduce 'bad' LDL cholesterol and increase 'good' protective HDL cholesterol. This helps to prevent the build up of plaque in your arteries, decreasing the chance of a heart attack or stroke. Foods rich in soy protein such as

- tofu,
- soymilk,
- soy patties and
- tempeh

are also usually low in saturated fat and cholesterol making them a nutritious alternative to meat. It is recommended that you consume 25g of soy proteins each day which can be met by having a glass (250ml) of soymilk and 120g tofu.

Moderate cholesterol intake

The body makes cholesterol itself. We now know that eating foods that contain cholesterol don't necessarily increase the cholesterol levels in your blood stream. So, you can have a moderate intake of cholesterol-rich foods such as eggs and prawns, but don't go overboard. It is advised that people can consume up to 6 eggs per week without having any significant effect on their cholesterol levels or increasing their risk of heart disease.

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