

Nutrition Topics
University of New Hampshire

Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a white, waxy fat found naturally in your body that is used for many important functions. When there is too much in the blood it can build up and clog arteries, causing blockage of blood to the heart.

Ideally, everyone over 20 years old should know what their blood level of cholesterol is, especially if there is a family history of heart disease or other medical concerns.

Total Cholesterol: The total amount of cholesterol in your blood.

LDL Cholesterol: The carrier part of the total cholesterol considered "bad" (carries cholesterol toward the arteries--buildup).

HDL Cholesterol: The carrier part of the total cholesterol considered "good" (carries cholesterol away from the heart).

WHAT CAN I DO TO IMPROVE MY "HDL?"

- If you smoke: quit smoking.
- If you're overweight: take appropriate steps to reach a healthier weight.
- The food suggestions here can help to increase a low HDL value as well as improve your overall health profile.
- Total body exercise: cardiovascular exercise such as brisk walking, cycling or dancing will also help control weight, stress and blood pressure. Work toward 30 minutes, 3-4 times per week.

FOOD: Change the FAT

Depending on the level of your blood cholesterol, your genetic makeup and usual eating and lifestyle habits, a low fat, low cholesterol meal plan can usually decrease elevated blood cholesterol. Levels can go down by about 10-15%, lowering your risk of heart disease by 20-30%.

1. Decrease total fat, especially saturated fat (Saturated fat can increase the "bad" LDL cholesterol in the blood.)

Reduce:

- Meat products high in fat (hamburger, bacon, sausage, skin on poultry, fat around meat)

- "Hydrogenated" products (read labels)

- Coconut and palm oils, lard, butter, whole milk, cream

Try Instead:

- Lean cuts and smaller portions of meat

- Try some meatless meals

- Snacks: pretzels, fruit, flavored rice cakes

- Jelly instead of butter on toast

- Mustard instead of mayonnaise

- Unsaturated fats: Go with monounsaturated fats when choosing oils (keep the total fat down too). Oils: olive and canola.

2. REDUCE DIETARY CHOLESTEROL

Reduce:

- Whole eggs, commercially made cakes and pies, organ meats like liver.

Try Instead:

- Egg whites

- Limit portions of lean meat and chicken to 6 ounces per day (the size of 2 decks of cards).

- Try also to decrease the amount of meat eaten in a total week.

- Eat more fiber: beans, whole grain breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables.

For more information or to speak with the dietitian, call 603-862-2583 or email at rochelle.litalien@unh.edu.

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