

10 Secrets to Better Cholesterol

By Jack Challem

By now you know that people with diabetes have a higher than average risk of developing coronary heart disease, so it's especially important to maintain normal levels of cholesterol, the umbrella term for different types of fat found in your blood. But drugs aren't the only option for keeping cholesterol and triglyceride levels in check. Some foods and supplements work almost as well as meds — and without any risk of side effects.

1. Eat some oats. Oats are rich in beta-glucan, a particular type of fiber that can lower cholesterol levels.

Suggestion: On Sunday, cook up a big batch of steel-cut oats (which have less impact on blood glucose than do rolled oats, but take longer to cook, too), and reheat portions throughout the week for breakfast. Add some cinnamon or berries to vary the flavor. Also, check out these dLife recipes that use oatmeal. Note: Oatmeal is not low in carbs, so keep portions small and remember to test your blood sugar one to two hours later.

2. Go fishing (at the supermarket). Coldwater fish, such as salmon and herring, contain omega-3 fats — the heart-healthiest fat you can eat. They're especially good at reducing triglycerides.

Tip: Pan fry a filet in olive oil, cooking it about 10 minutes per inch of thickness. Avoid deep-fried fish or seafood, though, because the bad cancels out the good. The dLife Recipe Finder contains more than 150 salmon recipes.

3. Go fishing for supplements. Don't like the taste of fish? Try the next best thing: fish oil capsules rich in omega-3 fats. The Food and Drug Administration have approved their use in treating people with very high triglyceride levels.

Fish oil supplements cut the risk of heart attacks by almost one-fifth. And more good news: Some companies now add a lemon flavor to mask the fishy taste.

4. Avoid trans fats. Trans fats, found in partially hydrogenated vegetable oils and shortening, raise the bad kind of cholesterol levels and lower the good kind. That's bad. To avoid trans fats, pass on deep-fried foods and carefully read the ingredient lists on food labels. In restaurants, tell the waiter you want to avoid any foods made with shortening or any hydrogenated oils.

5. Go nuts. Eating a handful of raw nuts — especially almonds — each day can lower cholesterol, triglycerides, and blood sugar. Pistachios and pecans are also top choices, but all nuts are good for you. Make your own trail mix with raw, unsalted nuts, and keep it handy in plastic bags you can take with you on the go. Here's a great recipe for a spicy mix of pecans, walnuts, and macadamias.

6. Use olive oil. Rich in heart-healthy, monounsaturated fat, olive oil can lower cholesterol levels, reduce the risk of blood clots, and even help with blood sugar regulation.

Tip: When you steam vegetables or eat salad, drizzle on extra-virgin oil for its delicious nutty flavor and health benefits.

7. Eat an avocado a day. Yes, they're high in calories — but it's from the same good fat that's found in olive oil. Plus, avocados are rich in fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Eating an avocado a day can lower cholesterol levels as much as some drugs do, according to some research. Try this recipe for "Brocamole" or check out dLife's other 90 recipes that benefit from this diabetes superfood.

8. Take a hike. Or at least go for a daily walk! You'll be surprised at the results. Most people aren't motivated to work out at a gym. Just going for regular walks, however, can lower cholesterol and triglyceride levels. Try to increase your pace and distance over several weeks.

9. Supplement with phytosterols. Dozens of studies have found that these plant compounds lead to substantial decreases in cholesterol. Food makers add phytosterols to some brands of margarine, yogurt, and other foods. However, supplements make for an effective and calorie-free way of getting these beneficial compounds, too.

10. Consider niacin. Niacin lowers total cholesterol while boosting the "good" high-density lipoprotein (HDL) form of cholesterol. It has had the green light for years from the FDA. But there is one downside: Niacin causes flushing, which can be accompanied by an intense tingling sensation, lasting from a few minutes to an hour. This side effect usually goes away over time. Some people are not affected as much as others. Talk with your doctor before taking it.

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