Managing Your Cholesterol

Heart and Health
Making changes in your diet, exercise and weight will help put you on the path to better heart and overall health.

A few other tips include:
- **Limit alcohol** – Drinking too much alcohol can increase your risk of heart disease. If you do drink alcohol, do so in moderation. Men should have no more than two drinks per day and women should have no more than one. One drink is 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine or 1 ounce of 80-proof liquor.
- **Take your medication(s)** – If your doctor has prescribed medication to lower your cholesterol, it is important that you take it as it will help reduce the risk of a heart attack and stroke.
- **Check your cholesterol level** – All adults should ask for a cholesterol check at least every 5 years. Some adults may need to have levels checked more often. Talk with your doctor about how often you should have your cholesterol checked.

Exercise
Exercise can help improve your cholesterol readings. Try to exercise for 40 minutes at a time, three or four times a week. Brisk walking, gardening, jogging and swimming are some examples. Be sure to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise program.

Quit Tobacco Products
Quitting smoking increases your good cholesterol among other health benefits. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you need help quitting smoking. You can also visit www.smokefree.gov or call 1-800-QUIT-NOW. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield Service Benefit Plan has a free tobacco cessation program. Visit www.fepblue.org for more information.

Sometime, in addition to lifestyle changes, medication for cholesterol is recommended if you have very high cholesterol and a history of heart attack, stroke, diabetes or other risk factors. Ask your doctor if further treatment to lower your cholesterol is right for you.

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Important Definitions

Cholesterol is a natural substance made by your liver. Your body needs cholesterol to make hormones and work properly. Cholesterol is found naturally in your blood and your cells, as well as in many of the foods you eat. However, a high cholesterol level can increase your risk for heart disease and lead to serious problems such as heart attacks and strokes.

Some definitions you should know:

**LDL cholesterol** means “low-density lipoprotein.” LDL transports the cholesterol from the liver to the tissues of the body, which is why it is called “bad” cholesterol.

**HDL cholesterol** means “high-density lipoprotein.” HDL transports cholesterol from the tissues of the body to the liver where it is removed from your body, which is why it is considered “good cholesterol.”

**Triglycerides** are the major form of fat stored by the body. They serve as the core structure of many types of lipids (fats). Triglycerides also enter the body from the food you eat.

**Total cholesterol** refers to all the types of cholesterol combined.

Controlling Cholesterol

What is a good plan to help control cholesterol?

Lifestyle changes are an important part of controlling cholesterol.

Diet

Food choices have a major impact on your cholesterol levels. Having a “heart healthy” eating plan is one that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, poultry, fish and nuts. Below are some ways to help improve your diet:

- **Cut back on trans fats**
  - Trans fats are found in processed foods like snacks (crackers and chips) and baked goods (muffins, cookies and cakes) with hydrogenated oil or partially hydrogenated oil

- **Reduce saturated fats**
  - For a women eating 1,800 calories a day, limit saturated fat to around 10 to 12 grams per day
  - For a man eating 2,500 calories per day, limit saturated fat to around 14 to 17 grams per day
  - Limit saturated fat to 5%-6% of your daily calories

- **Eat more fiber**
  - A high-soluble fiber diet can help reduce your risk of heart disease by blocking cholesterol and fats from being absorbed into the blood. Insoluble fiber helps with colon health. Some experts recommend aiming for around 25 grams of fiber per day. Refer to this chart on food ideas to increase fiber in your diet.

- **Choose foods with sterols and stanols**
  - These help lower bad cholesterol (LDL) by working to block absorption of cholesterol from the stomach and intestines. Sterols and stanols can often be found as added ingredients in some margarines and special formulations of orange juice. They are also found naturally in fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds.

  - Some people may benefit from limiting the amount of cholesterol they get from their diet. Ask your doctor what is right for you.

Weight Management

If you are overweight, losing weight can help lower your bad cholesterol (LDL) and triglycerides, while increasing your good cholesterol (HDL). Be sure to read the nutrition label on foods, as it provides the calories, portion size and nutritional value per serving. The nutrition label also helps you compare foods and keep track of your daily intake of food.

Nutritional Values

Start here to compare foods and drinks:

Every item has a different serving size. The numbers below reflect one serving size.

**Foods containing saturated fats include:**

- Lard
- Fatback and salt pork
- High-fat meats: regular ground beef, bologna, hot dogs, sausage, bacon and spare ribs
- High-fat dairy products: full-fat cheese, cream, ice cream, whole milk, 2% milk and sour cream
- Butter
- Cream sauces
- Gravy made with meat drippings
- Chocolate
- Coconut and coconut oil
- Poultry (chicken and turkey skin)
- Palm oil and palm kernel oil

- Whole grain foods
- Wheat and corn bran
- Nuts and seeds like walnuts, almonds, pistachios and sunflower seeds
- Vegetables like beets, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower and turnips

- Bean and legumes like lentils and chickpeas
- Grains like oatmeal, oat bran and barley
- Some juices and fruits like oranges, pears, prunes and apples
- Vegetables like peas, carrots, broccoli and sweet potatoes

**Check Calories per serving**

- Calories 170
- % Daily Value

**Percent of Daily Values**

- Total-Fat 1g
- Saturated Fat 0g
- Trans Fat 0g
- Cholesterol 0g
- Sodium 100g
- Total Carbohydrate 0g
- Dietary Fiber 0g
- Sugar 0g
- Protein 3g

- Vitamin A 0%
- Vitamin C 10%
- Calcium 5%
- Iron 5%
- Thiamin 2%
- Niacin 2%
- Vitamin B6 3%
- Phosphorus 3%
- Zinc 3%

* % Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily needs may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.