

BETTER HEALTH 4 YOU

SMART LOCAL 36 BENEFIT FUND

BP, CHOLESTEROL & HEART

Cholesterol: Top Foods to Improve Your Numbers

Overview

Diet can play an important role in lowering your cholesterol. Here are some foods to improve your cholesterol and protect your heart.

Can a bowl of oatmeal help lower your cholesterol? How about a handful of almonds? A few simple tweaks to your diet — along with exercise and other heart-healthy habits — might help you lower your cholesterol.

Oatmeal, oat bran and high-fiber foods

Oatmeal contains soluble fiber, which reduces your low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, the "bad" cholesterol. Soluble fiber is also found in such foods as kidney beans, Brussels sprouts, apples and pears.

Soluble fiber can reduce the absorption of cholesterol into your bloodstream. Five to 10 grams or more of soluble fiber a day decreases your LDL cholesterol. One serving of a breakfast cereal with oatmeal or oat bran provides 3 to 4 grams of fiber. If you add fruit, such as

a banana or berries, you'll get even more fiber.

Fish and omega-3 fatty acids

Fatty fish has high levels of omega-3 fatty acids, which can reduce your triglycerides — a type of fat found in blood — as well as reduce your blood pressure and risk of developing blood clots. In people who have already had heart attacks, omega-3 fatty acids may reduce the risk of sudden death.

Omega-3 fatty acids don't affect LDL cholesterol levels. But because of those acids' other heart benefits, the American Heart Association recommends eating at least two servings of fish a week. Baking or grilling the fish avoids adding unhealthy fats.

The highest levels of omega-3 fatty acids are in:

- Mackerel
- Herring
- Tuna
- Salmon
- Trout

Foods such as walnuts, flaxseed and canola oil also have small amounts of omega-3 fatty acids.

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Southwest Avocado-Bell Quiche Cups

4 large eggs
10/2 cup fat-free plain yogurt
2 large egg whites
2 TBS low-sodium taco seasoning
1 large avocado
½ cup Jack cheese; shredded
1 can diced green chiles, drained
4 medium bell peppers, halved & seeded
Preheat oven to 275°. Line baking dish with foil and spray foil. Whisk eggs, yogurt, egg whites and taco seasoning. Stir in cheese, avocado and chiles. Spoon mixture into pepper halves. Bake 35-40 minutes.

Nutrition Information Per serving: 264 calories, 15g fat, 189mg chol, 16g carbs, 16g protein, 533mg sodium. 7g fiber **SERVINGS: 4**



Omega-3 and fish oil supplements are available. Talk to your doctor before taking any supplements.

Almonds and other nuts

Almonds and other tree nuts can improve blood cholesterol. A recent study concluded that a diet supplemented with walnuts can lower the risk of heart complications in people with history of a heart attack. All nuts are high in calories, so a handful added to a salad or eaten as a snack will do.

Avocados

Avocados are a potent source of nutrients as well as monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs). Research suggests that adding an avocado a day to a heart-healthy diet can help improve LDL cholesterol levels in people who are overweight or obese.

People tend to be most familiar with avocados in guacamole, which usually is eaten with high-fat corn chips. Try adding avocado slices to salads and sandwiches or eating them as a side dish. Also try guacamole with raw cut vegetables, such as cucumber slices.

Replacing saturated fats, such as those found in meats, with MUFAs are part of what makes the Mediterranean diet heart healthy.

Olive oil

Try using olive oil in place of other fats in your diet. You can sauté vegetables in olive oil, add it to a marinade or mix it

with vinegar as a salad dressing. You can also use olive oil as a substitute for butter when basting meat or as a dip for bread.

Foods with added plant sterols or stanols

Sterols and stanols are substances found in plants that help block the absorption of cholesterol. Foods that have been fortified with sterols or stanols are available.

Margarines and orange juice with added plant sterols can help reduce LDL cholesterol. Adding 2 grams of sterol to your diet every day can lower your LDL cholesterol by 5 to 15 percent.

It's not clear whether food with plant sterols or stanols reduces your risk of heart attack or stroke — although experts assume that foods that reduce cholesterol do reduce the risk. Plant sterols or stanols don't appear to affect levels of triglycerides or of high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol, the "good" cholesterol.

Whey protein

Whey protein, which is found in dairy products, may account for many of the health benefits attributed to dairy. Studies have shown that whey protein given as a supplement lowers both LDL and total cholesterol as well as blood pressure. You can find whey protein powders in health food stores and some grocery stores.

Other changes to your diet

Getting the full benefit of these foods requires other changes to your diet and lifestyle. One of the most beneficial changes is limiting the saturated and trans fats you eat.

Saturated fats — such as those in meat, butter, cheese and other full-fat dairy products — raise your total cholesterol. Decreasing your consumption of saturated fats to less than 7 percent of your total daily calorie intake can reduce your LDL cholesterol by 8 to 10 percent.

Trans fats, sometimes listed on food labels as "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil," are often used in margarines and store-bought cookies, crackers and cakes. Trans fats raise overall cholesterol levels. The Food and Drug Administration has banned the use of partially hydrogenated vegetable oils by Jan. 1, 2021.