

# Heart-Healthy Eating



CARDIAC HEALTH  
RESOURCES  
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## WHY LOWER CHOLESTEROL?



You hear it all the time: "Watch your cholesterol!" Our bodies do need *some* cholesterol, but too much can be harmful. That's why we need to keep it at a healthy level.

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance. It can build up on the walls of blood vessels and block the flow of blood. That can lead to a heart attack or a stroke. But you can take steps to lower your cholesterol and help your

heart!

A diet high in saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol can raise your blood cholesterol to unhealthy levels. It helps to cut down on egg yolks, high-fat meats, fried foods, and full-fat milks and cheeses. Other things can affect your cholesterol. These include your age, sex, weight, genes, and how active you are.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Some things can be changed and some can't. You can't change your age, sex, or genes. But you *can* help your heart in other ways.

- If you smoke, quit. That can cut your risk of heart attack in half.
- Eat a healthy diet low in saturated fat and trans fat.
- Eat lots of whole grains, veggies, and fruits.

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- Get to and stay at a healthy weight.
- Get 30 minutes of physical activity each day. Do 10 minutes three times a day if that works better for you.

### **GET YOUR CHOLESTEROL CHECKED**

There are two types of cholesterol: LDL—the “bad” kind that builds up in your blood vessels—and HDL—the “good” kind that takes the “bad” kind away.

Your cholesterol level is checked by a blood test. In general, your total number should be under 200. If it is 200 or above, changes in your diet may help you lower it to a healthy level.

You and your doctor can decide what *your* goals should be, based on your risk factors.

### **A HEART-HEALTHY DIET**

If you need to lower your cholesterol, a diet lower in saturated fat and trans fat can help you do that. There are easy ways you can cut fat from your diet and help lower cholesterol. Fill up on whole grains, vegetables, and fruits.

Cholesterol in food you eat also raises cholesterol levels in your body. Cholesterol is found only in foods that come from animals, like eggs, meat, and milk. So choose low-fat or fat-free versions of these foods. Eat egg whites instead of the whole egg. Eat more plant foods.

You can help lower your cholesterol with a diet that is:

<b>Low in saturated fat and trans fat</b>	Avoid full-fat milk and cheese, butter, fried food, and high-fat meat, sauce, and gravy. Use tub or liquid margarine instead of stick margarine. Avoid solid white shortening.
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<b>Low in cholesterol</b>	Cut back on animal products. Avoid egg yolks. Try beans or soy foods instead of meat.
<b>Rich in fiber and whole grains</b>	Eat five or more fruits and veggies each day. Eat whole-wheat breads and pastas, brown rices, and whole-grain cereals.

### WHAT ABOUT PILLS?

Some people try diet and lifestyle changes and still cannot lower their cholesterol. In those cases, the doctor may prescribe a drug that lowers cholesterol. It is still important to eat heart-healthy foods, get some activity, and stay at a healthy weight when taking these drugs. This can help reduce the amount of medicine needed.

### NOTES: