

For good cholesterol levels

A good diet, rich in fruit, vegetables, wholegrain cereals and low in saturated fat and salt is a key part of managing raised cholesterol. Here we share the main ways in which diet can help you to achieve good cholesterol levels.

1. Be a healthy weight for your height. A good guide is your waist measurement which should be measured at the widest point. Ideally it should be less than 94cm (37 inches) in men and less than 80cm (32 inches) in women. For Asian men it should be less than 89cm (35 inches) and 80cm (31.5 inches) in Asian women.
2. Avoid saturated fats found in butter, ghee, lard, full fat dairy foods, meat and meat products. Replace these with fats high in monounsaturated fatty acids found in olive oil and rapeseed oil or fats high in polyunsaturates found in sunflower oil, corn oil and soya oil.
3. Make starchy foods like cereals, pasta, rice, chapattis, potatoes, noodles and bread the basis of most meals. Try to include wholemeal or whole grain varieties wherever possible. These are richer in fibre, B vitamins, vitamin E, trace minerals and other valuable plant chemicals than their refined equivalents. We recommend eating three portions every day.
4. Oats can count as one of your whole grains and has been shown to lower cholesterol. Porridge contains a form of soluble fibre called oat beta-glucans which helps reduce cholesterol levels. It works by forming a gel inside the intestines. This gel binds to cholesterol and bile in your gut preventing them from being absorbed. As a result your body has to break down cholesterol to produce bile, which is then released into the gut as part of the digestive process.
5. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables – at least 5 portions a day. A portion is: 1 glass of fruit juice, a dessert-bowl of salad, a medium sized fruit, 2 tablespoons raw, cooked, canned or frozen vegetables. Choose a variety of different coloured fruits and vegetables for a range of different antioxidant nutrients.
6. Have 2-3 portions of the low fat dairy foods per day. Calcium fortified soya products are suitable alternatives.
7. Use products fortified with plant sterols or stanols daily. These are found in functional foods such as the Flora Proactive and Benecol range as well as own label products. It is important to have 2-2.5g per day of plant sterols and stanols in order to achieve the 10-15% cholesterol lowering effect. This is achieved by having 3 portions of the fortified spreads, yoghurt and milk each day or a combination of all three. Alternatively one mini yoghurt drink provides all three portions in one go. They should be eaten with meals for maximum benefit.
8. Eat a handful (1oz/25g) of nuts each day in cooking or as a snack. These contain mono unsaturated fats as well as magnesium, vitamin E, fibre and potassium, all of which are beneficial for the heart. Avoid salted varieties.
9. Include a variety of pulses (dahls (lentils), peas, beans) each day. Like oats these contain a form of soluble fibre that helps reduce the amount of cholesterol and bile that your body absorbs.
10. Remember convenience foods can be quite high in fat. Always check the label. A lot of fat is 20g or more per 100g. A lot of saturated fat is 5g or more per 100g.

11. Include foods rich in Omega 3 fats. Oily fish is the best source of the long chain Omega 3 fats which can help lower triglycerides and improve circulation. Try to include 2-3 portions per week. White fish and seafood contain smaller amounts of these Omega 3 fats. If you don't eat fish you can supplement your diet with fish oil from the health food store. Look out for the magic ingredients EPA and DHA and try to ensure a supplement that provides at least 500mg – 1g per day of EPA and DHA combined.
12. Reducing the amount of salt that you eat will help lower your blood pressure. As much as three quarters of salt comes from processed foods so check out those labels. Some products label salt, others label sodium. As a guide:

A lot of salt is 1.5g salt or more per 100g
(0.6g sodium or more per 100g)

A little salt is 0.3g of salt or less per 100g
(0.1g sodium or less per 100g)

13. Enjoy alcohol with food but keep to sensible limits. Try to limit to no more than 2-3 units each day. A unit is a half-pint of normal strength beer, lager or cider or a pub measure of sherry or spirits. A typical pub measure of wine is now around 2 units.
14. Although having a healthy diet is a central part of reducing cholesterol levels, it is only one aspect of living a healthy lifestyle. Changing diet, losing weight, being more active and stopping smoking should all contribute to lowering your cholesterol levels. For some people it may be necessary to use medication to further reduce cholesterol to acceptable limits.

For more information

For more information on how soya, nuts, soluble fibre and plant sterols can lower cholesterol, check out the **Portfolio Diet** and **Ultimate Cholesterol Lowering Plan** factsheets.