

Food Tips to Lower Your LDL (Bad) Cholesterol

LDL (bad) cholesterol can build up in the arteries. This build-up increases the chance that you will develop heart disease. LDL cholesterol lab goals vary and are based on your risk factors. Discuss your goals with your provider.

Limit intake of saturated fat, dietary cholesterol, and avoid trans-fat.

Saturated fat is found in fatty meats such as beef and pork, whole milk, cheese, heavy cream, coconut oil, palm kernel oil, butter, fried foods, egg yolks and some baked goods.

Trans fats are not common in many foods anymore but still may be found in fried foods.

Many of the foods rich in saturated and trans fats are also high in dietary cholesterol.

Tips to lower saturated fats, trans fat, and cholesterol:

- Focus on lean meats, poultry, or fish and keep portions to 1-2 servings (3.5 oz) per meal.
- Limit beef or pork to once per week.
- Choose skim or low-fat dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt, ice cream) and limit full-fat cheese to 3-4 times per week.
- Use liquid oils (canola, olive, avocado) instead of solid fats (butter, lard, shortening, coconut, and palm oils).
- Add beans, soy products and nuts to your diet.
- Limit foods that contain partially hydrogenated oils.
- Limit egg yolks to <5 per week.
- Avoid liver and other organ meats.

- Limit shrimp to 3-5 ounces per week.
- Limit saturated fats to about 13 grams per day or less and trans fats to 2 grams a day or less.

Add in healthy fats. These are liquid fats, also called “unsaturated fats.” These can help lower LDL cholesterol. Omega-3 fats are also healthy fats and are often called “polyunsaturated fats.” These are better at lowering LDL cholesterol. To increase healthy fat intake:

- Have fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, herring, lake trout, sardines, and albacore tuna 2 times per week.
- Add a handful of nuts and seeds daily, such as walnuts, almonds, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, flax seeds, or chia seeds.
- In cooking, use olive or avocado oils for heart healthy benefits. Other options include sesame or canola oil.
- Use avocados or nut butter for spreads or toppings.
- Include low-fat proteins like tofu, soybeans, soy nuts, tempeh, and edamame more often.

Eat foods high in fiber. Eating foods that are high in fiber helps lower cholesterol and is also good for helping digestion and overall health. Foods that are high in soluble fiber are better at lowering LDL cholesterol. It’s best to slowly increase the amount of fiber in your diet as this prevents stomach aches, bloating, gas, constipation, and diarrhea. A general goal for total fiber intake is 25-35 g per day.

Ways to increase the fiber in your diet:

- Eat 2-4 servings of fruit and 4-8 servings of non-starchy vegetables per day.
- Make most of your grains whole grains such as wheat, barley, brown rice, wild rice, quinoa, oatmeal, or oat bran.
- Have beans or nuts as a topping on salads or as the protein in a veggie wrap.
- Include oat bran, oatmeal, barley, legumes, chia seeds, and ground flax seed more often as they are high in soluble fiber.

Add plant stanols or sterols. Include 2 grams of plant stanols or sterols per day. This may help lower your LDL cholesterol. Stanols and sterols are found in fortified foods or supplements. To add these in your diet you can:

- Add foods fortified with stanols and sterols. Ask your dietitian for more information.
- Include daily supplements such as CardioSterols or Cholestoff capsules and Benecol chews or spreads.

Achieve healthy weight. If you are overweight, losing 3-5% of your body weight may help you to lower your LDL cholesterol. To help lose weight, you can:

- Increase fruits and vegetables.
- Decrease added sugars from sugar sweetened drinks.
- Eat smaller portions using the plate method or using smaller plates.
- Cook at home more often.

Get at least 150 minutes (2.5 hours) of exercise every week. Exercise can help increase your levels of HDL (good) cholesterol which helps to remove LDL cholesterol from the blood. Adding exercise may also help with weight loss.

Aim for 30 minutes of physical activity 5 days per week at a moderate pace where you can talk but not sing. Choose activities that you enjoy such as a brisk walk, biking, swimming, sports, or running.

Include a vegetarian style meal once per week. Eating plant proteins from beans, peas, lentils, soy, and nuts may help lower your LDL cholesterol. Including soy protein from soybeans, edamame, soy nuts, tofu, tempeh, soy milk, soy yogurt, or textured soy protein may also help. See how much protein you can get from some soy-based foods below:

- ½ cup cooked soybeans = 14 g
- ½ cup edamame = 11 g
- ¼ cup soy nuts = 15 g
- ½ cup tofu = 10 g
- ½ cup tempeh = 15 g
- ¼ cup textured soy protein, dry = 11 g
- 1 cup soy milk = 7 g
- 1 cup soy yogurt = 5 g

Sample Meal Ideas to Lower LDL Cholesterol

Breakfast

- Oatmeal: 1 cup cooked Oats with 1% milk (4 oz.) with 2 Tbsp. walnuts, 1 tsp brown sugar and 1 medium banana.
- 1 hard-boiled egg, 1 slice whole wheat toast with 1 tsp jam and 1 orange.
- 1 cup whole grain cereal with 4 oz. 1% milk and ½ cup fresh or frozen berries.
- 1 slice of whole wheat toast with 1 Tbsp. natural peanut butter and ½ cup sliced strawberries.
- 2 egg whites scrambled with 1 cup fresh spinach, seasoned with black

pepper or salt-free seasoning, and a medium apple.

Lunch and Dinner

- 3 oz. chicken salad made with non-fat Greek yogurt, lettuce and ½ of x100% whole wheat pita pocket, ½ cup fruit salad and 1% milk.
- 1 whole grain tortilla roll-up with 3 oz. low sodium turkey, 1 oz. Swiss cheese, and 1 Tbsp. mustard, 1 cup raw snow peas and 1 cup frozen or fresh grapes.
- 3 oz. tuna salad in a whole wheat pita pocket with 3-4 slices bell peppers and 2 tomato slices, and a medium apple.
- 3 oz. roasted turkey with ½ cup sautéed carrots and onions, 1 cup lettuce salad with 1 Tbsp. olive oil and balsamic vinegar dressing.
- ¾ cup marinara sauce with ground turkey or lean ground beef over 1 cup spaghetti squash, 1 cup romaine salad with 1 Tbsp. olive oil and balsamic vinegar dressing, and 1 cup fresh fruit salad.
- 4 oz baked cod, ½ cup brown rice with scallions, and 1 cup roasted beets.
- 4 oz baked salmon, ½ cup wild rice, and 1 cup roasted brussels sprouts with balsamic vinegar and 1 oz pine nuts.
- 3 oz tuna salad sandwich on 2 slices whole grain bread, 1 cup raw carrots, and 1 cup fresh fruit.
- 2 cups spring mix or spinach with cherry tomatoes, sliced carrots, sliced radishes, cucumber slices, 1 oz almonds, 3 oz grilled chicken, and 2 Tbsp oil/vinegar salad dressing with 1 cup fresh fruit.
- 1 cup garbanzo bean and potato curry, 1 cup side salad with 1 Tbsp oil/vinegar dressing.

- 1 cup cooked quinoa with ½ cup beans (black or garbanzo or kidney) and variety of vegetables sautéed with garlic and onion in olive oil.
- ½ cup cooked brown rice and ½ cup cooked quinoa – sautéed with onions and garlic mixed with vegetables and protein of choice (fish or chicken or turkey).
- 1 cup cooked whole grain (Quinoa or brown rice or half cup of each) sautéed in olive oil with 2 hard-boiled egg whites. Use garlic and onion for sauteing.

Snacks

- 1 medium apple + 1 low fat string cheese
- 2 Tbsp nuts + 2 Tbsp dried fruit
- 1 cup pea pods + ½ cup low-fat Greek yogurt
- 1 oz. peanuts in a shell + 1 medium orange
- 1 cup bell pepper strips + 1/3 cup guacamole
- 2 Tbsp Hummus + 1 cup baby carrots
- 1 medium nectarine + 1 oz. almonds
- 4 oz light yogurt + 1 oz. walnuts
- 1 Light Laughing Cow® cheese + 1 cup grape tomatoes
- 4 oz Greek yogurt + 1 oz. almonds
- 1 small plum + low-fat cheese
- 1 medium apple, sliced + 1 Tbsp natural peanut butter
- ½ cup low-fat cottage cheese or low-fat Greek yogurt + fruit

Who to Call

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions, please call UW Health at the phone number below. You can also visit our website at www.uwhealth.org/nutrition.

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children's Hospital (AFCH)
(608) 890-5500

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright 10/2024. University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#519.