



# How Can I Improve My Cholesterol?

There are lifestyle changes that you can make to improve your cholesterol. You can eat healthy foods, reach and maintain a healthy weight and be physically active. Some people also need to take medicine to lower their cholesterol because changing their lifestyle and diet isn't enough. Your healthcare providers can help you set up a plan to improve your cholesterol.

Most heart and blood vessel disease is caused by a buildup of cholesterol, plaque and other fatty deposits in artery walls. The arteries that feed the heart can become so clogged that the blood flow is reduced, causing chest pain. If a blood clot forms and blocks the artery, a heart attack can occur. Similarly, if a blood clot blocks an artery leading to or in the brain, a stroke results.



Cholesterol can join with fats and other substances in your blood to build up in the inner walls of your arteries. The arteries can become clogged and narrow, and blood flow is reduced.

## What should I eat?

Focus on eating foods low in saturated and *trans* fats such as:

- A variety of fruits and vegetables.
- A variety of whole grain foods like whole grain bread, cereal, pasta and brown rice. (At least half of the servings should be whole grains.)
- Fat-free, 1 percent and low-fat milk products.
- Poultry without skin and lean meats. When you choose to eat red meat and pork, select options labeled “loin” and “round.” These cuts usually have the least amount of fat.
- Fatty fish such as salmon, trout, albacore tuna and sardines. Enjoy at least 8 ounces of non-fried fish each week, which may be divided over two 3.5- to 4-ounce servings.
- Unsalted nuts, seeds, and legumes (dried beans or peas).
- Nontropical vegetable oils like canola, corn, olive, or safflower oils.

## What should I limit?

- Foods with a lot of sodium (salt)
- Sweets and sugar-sweetened beverages
- Red meats and fatty meats that aren't trimmed
- Meats that have been processed with a lot of sodium
- Full-fat dairy products such as whole milk, cream, ice cream, butter, and cheese
- Baked goods made with saturated and *trans* fats like donuts, cakes cookies
- Foods that list the words “hydrogenated oils” in the ingredients panel
- Saturated oils like coconut oil, palm oil and palm kernel oil
- Solid fats like shortening, stick margarine and lard
- Fried foods

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### What are some cooking tips for me?

- Add a variety of fruits and vegetables to your meals.
- Use a rack to drain off fat when you broil, roast or bake poultry and meats.
- Look for leaner cuts if you choose to eat meat.
- Don't baste with drippings; use wine, fruit juice or marinade.
- Broil or grill instead of pan-frying.
- Cut off all visible fat from meat before cooking.
- Remove the skin from poultry pieces.
- Use a vegetable oil spray to brown or sauté foods.
- Serve smaller portions of higher-calorie dishes.
- Use low-fat, low-sodium options instead of regular cheese.



### HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at **heartinsight.org**.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at **heart.org/supportnetwork**.

### Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

**What about eating out?**

**Why are weight control and physical activity important?**

### My Questions:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.