



CHOLESTEROL AWARENESS MONTH

September is Cholesterol Awareness Month

Make a Fresh Start this Fall

With the fresh autumn breeze, you can almost feel change in the air. This is a great time to find new ways to help you stay fit - like incorporating some new dishes into your diet. You can [eat healthy and dine out, too](#). Many restaurants offer delicious meals that are low in saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol (each of which contribute to raised blood cholesterol). High blood cholesterol is a major risk factor for heart disease, and it's also a risk factor for stroke.

Lowering cholesterol... How low should you go?

Strict vegetarians don't get any cholesterol in their diets, but they still have plenty of cholesterol in their blood. So does everyone else. In fact, even folks in the burger and fries crowd can trace about two-thirds of their blood cholesterol to their metabolism, not their appetites.

Cholesterol is manufactured in the liver. Diet certainly influences how much your liver produces — when you eat more saturated or trans fat, your liver churns out more cholesterol — but even with a vegetarian diet, regular exercise, and a trim build, the liver produces an irreducible minimum amount of cholesterol. It is a good thing too, since cholesterol makes vital contributions to health. For one thing, it is a major component of all human cell membranes. For another, it is the building block of steroid hormones, including cortisol, estrogen, and testosterone.

Scientists know that cholesterol is essential, but they also know that high levels of LDL ("bad") cholesterol dramatically increase the risk for heart attacks, angina, peripheral artery disease, and stroke. And they have discovered that reducing LDL cholesterol reduces risk. As studies have accumulated, the targets for LDL cholesterol levels have steadily declined. For healthy people, an LDL of 160 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL) was once considered acceptable; now 130 mg/dL is okay, and 100 mg/dL, ideal. For people with stable coronary artery disease, diabetes, hypertension, or other major cardiovascular risk factors, the targets are more stringent still: 100 mg/dL is okay, 70 mg/dL or less, ideal. And for patients with unstable coronary heart disease, it's 70 mg/dL or bust. Diet, weight control, and exercise are essential for everyone who needs to reduce his cholesterol.

A very low LDL may not be so radical after all. With or without medication, it is back to basics. In practical terms, the bottom line is simple: **The higher your HDL cholesterol, the better.** However, the biological reality is more complex. Research into the molecular biology of HDL is spurring new therapies. When it comes to HDL cholesterol, the higher your level, the better. Still, targets are important. The National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) and the American Diabetes Association advise aiming for HDL levels of at least 40 mg/dL. An even more protective goal, according to the NCEP, is 60 mg/dL or higher.

Exercise. Exercise is an important way to boost HDL levels. On average, sedentary people who start to exercise regularly can expect their HDL levels to rise by 3% to 20%. The benefit can occur with as little as one mile of walking or jogging a day, but the more you do, the better your result. **Brisk walking for 40 minutes a day is a good target, but if you need more help, aim higher.**

Watch your dietary fats. Saturated fat will not affect your HDL cholesterol, but it will raise your LDL cholesterol. **The latest American Heart Association (AHA) guidelines call for limiting saturated fat to less than 7% of your total daily calories.** Reduce your intake of trans fats to less than 1% of your total daily calories. Trans fat lowers HDL cholesterol and raises LDL cholesterol, a double whammy to health. However, unsaturated fats like virgin olive oil may boost HDL levels, and the omega 3 fats in fish, nuts, and canola oil may promote cardiac health even if they don't affect your HDL reading.

Watch your carbs! At least the types of carbs you are eating. Diets that provide large amounts of rapidly absorbed carbohydrates are clearly linked to low levels of HDL cholesterol. **Avoid highly refined carbohydrates in favor of coarsely ground, whole grain, and unrefined carbs like whole grain bread, oatmeal, and beans.**

Alcohol. Moderate drinking will raise HDL levels by about 4 mg/dL, which should cut cardiac risk by about 10%. This translates to one to two drinks a day for men, and one drink a day for women. For this "prescription," count 5 ounces of wine, 1½ ounces of liquor, or 12 ounces of beer as one drink.



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Weight control. Obesity is linked to low HDL levels, but weight loss can help. **Exercise and diet are the dynamic duo for weight loss, but shedding excess pounds will boost HDL levels over and above the independent effects of regular exercise and a healthful diet.**

FACTS About the New Food Label: Saturated Fat, Trans Fat, and Cholesterol

- ☑ **Trans fat** is a type of fat that is formed when vegetable oil is hardened through a process called hydrogenation. This process helps makes foods more solid, gives them shape, and prolongs their shelf life.
- ☑ **Saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol** in the diet all raise the level of LDL "bad" cholesterol in the blood. The higher the LDL cholesterol, the greater the risk for coronary heart disease (CHD), the main form of heart disease and a leading cause of death, illness, and disability in the United States. Saturated fat and trans fat raise LDL similarly, but Americans consume 4-5 times as much saturated fat as trans fat. Saturated fat is the chief dietary culprit that raises LDL, but consumers need to know about all 3 - saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol - in the foods they eat to reduce their risk for CHD and stay heart-healthy.
- ☑ High amounts of **saturated fat** are found in animal products, such as fatty cuts of meat, chicken skin, and full-fat dairy products like butter, whole milk, cream, and cheese, and in tropical vegetable oils such as palm, palm kernel, and coconut oil. **Trans fat** is found in some of the same foods as saturated fat, such as vegetable shortening, some margarines (especially hard or stick margarine), crackers, cookies, baked goods, fried foods, and other processed foods made with partially hydrogenated vegetable oils. Small amounts of trans fat also occur naturally in some animal products, such as milk products, beef, and lamb. Foods high in **cholesterol** include liver, other organ meats, egg yolks, shrimp, and full-fat dairy products.
- ☑ The **FDA's rule** requires that the amount of trans fat be listed on a separate line under saturated fat on the Nutrition Facts panel of the food label. The new label enables consumers to know the amount of saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol in a serving of the food they eat.
- ☑ Check the **Nutrition Facts** panel of the food label. Choose foods lower in saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol. For saturated fat and cholesterol, you can also use the Percent Daily Value (%DV): 5% DV or less is low, and 20% DV or more is high. (There is no %DV for trans fat.)
- ☑ The **combined** amount of saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol in butter is usually higher than in margarine, even though some margarine contains more trans fat than butter. There are margarines available that contain no trans fat. Soft (tub) or liquid margarine usually contains less trans fat than hard (stick) margarine and less saturated fat and cholesterol than butter.

To keep your cholesterol under control: schedule a screening; eat foods low in cholesterol and saturated fat; maintain a healthy weight; exercise regularly and follow your healthcare professional's advice.

Knowing [the facts](#) about cholesterol can help you improve your heart health and reduce the risk of heart disease. [Be prepared](#) for any type of restaurant with these tips for ordering low-saturated fat, low-cholesterol meals.

Lifestyle Changes: Your diet, weight, physical activity and exposure to tobacco smoke all affect your cholesterol level — and these factors may be controlled by eating a [heart healthy diet](#), enjoying [regular physical activity](#), and [avoiding tobacco smoke](#).

Drug Therapy for Cholesterol: For some people, lifestyle changes are not enough to reach healthy cholesterol levels. Your doctor may prescribe medication. Learn about: [types](#) of cholesterol-lowering drugs. [tips for taking](#) medications.

Helpful Tools: Learn the facts about cholesterol, have regular screenings and, if you need to lower your cholesterol level, work with your healthcare professionals to set up a plan with the help of our cholesterol-lowering tools: [Cholesterol Tracker](#); [The Cholesterol Choice](#); [Cholesterol Questions To Ask Your Doctor](#) ; [Answers By Heart Patient Information Sheets](#) ;[Cholesterol Heart Profilers](#).

Information contained in this article is from: American Heart Association, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, Harvard HealthBeat.