

# CHOLESTEROL: TOP FOODS TO IMPROVE YOUR NUMBERS

*Diet can play an important role in lowering your cholesterol. Here are the top foods to lower your cholesterol and protect your heart.*

Source: Mayo Clinic

Can a bowl of oatmeal help lower your cholesterol? How about a handful of walnuts or an avocado? A few simple tweaks to your diet — like these, along with exercise and other heart-healthy habits — might help you lower your cholesterol.

**Oatmeal** contains soluble fiber, which reduces your low-density lipoprotein (LDL), the “bad” cholesterol. Soluble fiber is also found in such foods as kidney beans, apples, pears, barley and prunes.

Soluble fiber can reduce the absorption of cholesterol into your bloodstream. Eating 1 1/2 cups of cooked oatmeal provides 6 grams of fiber. If you add fruit, such as bananas, you’ll add about 4 more grams of fiber

**Fatty fish** can be heart healthy because of its high levels of omega-3 fatty acids, which can reduce your blood pressure and risk of developing blood clots. In people who have already had heart attacks, fish oil — or omega-3 fatty acids — may reduce the risk of sudden death.

The American Heart Association recommends eating at least two servings of fish a week. The highest levels of omega-3 fatty acids are in: Mackerel, Lake trout, Herring, Sardines, Albacore tuna, Salmon, and Halibut.

**Walnuts, almonds and other tree nuts** can improve blood cholesterol. Rich in mono- and polyunsaturated fatty acids, walnuts also help keep blood vessels healthy.

Eating about a handful (1.5 ounces, or 42.5 grams) a day of most nuts, such as almonds, hazelnuts, peanuts, pecans, some pine nuts, pistachio nuts and walnuts, may reduce your risk of heart disease. Make sure the nuts you eat aren’t salted or coated with sugar.

## Other changes to your diet

Although some fats are healthy, you need to limit the saturated and trans fats you eat. Saturated fats, like those in meat, butter, cheese and other full-fat dairy products, and some oils, raise your total cholesterol. Trans fats, often used in margarines and store-bought cookies, crackers and cakes, are particularly bad for your cholesterol levels. Trans fats raise LDL cholesterol, and lower high-density lipoprotein (HDL), the “good” cholesterol.

Food labels report the content of trans fats, but, unfortunately, only in foods that contain at least one gram per serving. That means you could be getting some trans fats in a number of foods, which could add up to enough trans fats in a day to be unhealthy and increase cholesterol. If a food label lists “partially hydrogenated oil,” it has trans fat, and it’s best to avoid it.

In addition to changing your diet, making other heart-healthy lifestyle changes is key to improving your cholesterol. Exercising, quitting smoking and maintaining a healthy weight will help keep your cholesterol at a healthy level.

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