

# Eating Guidelines To Improve Your Blood Cholesterol Levels

Your eating and exercise habits can affect your blood cholesterol levels.

Total blood cholesterol contains two types of cholesterol:

- | Low Density lipoproteins (LDL) or “bad cholesterol” can form plaque (atherosclerosis) on your artery walls and block blood flow to your heart. Aim for low LDL levels.
- | High Density lipoproteins (HDL) or “good cholesterol” helps remove LDL cholesterol from your arteries. Aim for high HDL levels.

This fact sheet provides healthy eating guidelines to improve your blood cholesterol levels (increase your HDL and decrease your LDL) and decrease your risk for developing heart disease and stroke.



## Steps you can take

1. Aim for a healthy body weight. Weight loss can improve your blood cholesterol levels.
2. Eat a variety of foods recommended in [Canada's Food Guide](#) and follow the suggested number of servings for your age in all the food groups.
3. Select your fat sources wisely.
  - | Choose foods that are lower in saturated fat. Examples include:
    - | Lean cuts of meat, such as beef or pork tenderloin, centre cut pork loin, lean ground beef, pork or poultry, skinless fish and poultry
    - | Skim, 1% or 2% milk and lower fat milk alternatives such as cheese with 20% or less milk fat (M.F.)
    - | Legumes (peas, beans and lentils)
  - | Include small amounts of vegetable based fats or unsaturated fats (monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fats) in your diet. Examples include:

- ┆ Canola, safflower, sunflower, soybean, peanut and olive oil and salad dressing and mayonnaise made with unsaturated fats
  - ┆ Unsalted nuts and their butters, such as almond butter and unsalted peanuts and peanut butter
  - ┆ Unsalted seeds
  - ┆ Soft, non-hydrogenated margarine made from unsaturated oils
  - ┆ Avocados
  - ┆ Fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, sardines, Atlantic herring and trout. Aim for two servings each week.
  - ┆ Avoid foods that are made with trans, hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated fat. Check food labels and avoid foods high in these fats. Examples include:
    - ┆ Fried foods, such as deep fried chicken nuggets and French fries
    - ┆ Frozen prepared foods such as meat pies, pizza and waffles
    - ┆ Snack foods such as potato chips, cookies, donuts and crackers made with hydrogenated oils
    - ┆ Margarine and vegetable shortening made with hydrogenated oils
    - ┆ Pastries, croissants and other baked goods made with hydrogenated oils.
4. Limit intake of sweetened food and beverages that can replace healthier foods.
- ┆ Substitute sweetened beverages such as pop, speciality coffees and those labelled as drinks, cocktails or punches with water, soda water or tea
  - ┆ Snack on whole fruit or chopped vegetables instead of candies, chocolate, store bought cookies, cakes, pastries, donuts, pies or ice cream.
5. Eat foods high in soluble fibre.
- ┆ Aim for 10 - 25 g/day of soluble fibre per day
  - ┆ Food sources include oat bran, psyllium, barley, legumes (such

as chick peas, red, black or pinto beans and lentils) and some whole grains, vegetables, fruit and flax seed.

6. Include soy protein in your diet.

- | Aim for at least 20 g/day and include soy beverages, yogurts and tofu or tempeh that can be cubed or crumbled into soup, salad, stir fries and tomato sauces.

7. Eat a handful (60 mL (¼ cup)) of unsalted nuts and seeds five or more times a week.

- | Try unsalted pumpkin, sunflower and sesame seeds, almonds, walnuts, pecans, hazelnuts, cashews, pistachios, and peanuts
- | Eat them fresh or dry roasted and unsalted as a snack; add them to main dishes or salads; and use them in baking.

8. Select foods that contain plant sterols.

- | Plant sterols occur naturally in whole grains, nuts, vegetables and fruit. It is hard to eat enough of these foods to get the recommended level of 2 grams/day so choose food products that have added plant sterols such as soft margarines, juices and yogurts
- | Check the product label for the terms: phytosterol, plant sterol or sterol esters
- | Plant sterols are not advised for children and pregnant women.

9. Prepare foods using healthy cooking methods such as baking, poaching, steaming, broiling, roasting and stir frying in small amounts of unsaturated oil or fat.

10. Read food labels carefully.

- | Use the food label to choose products lower in saturated and trans fat
- | At restaurants, or when ordering take-out food, ask your server how foods are prepared so you can request changes if needed.

11. Dietary Cholesterol

- | Cholesterol is not an essential nutrient. Your body can make what it needs. Most people do not need to count their dietary cholesterol intake for the day.
- | If you have high blood cholesterol levels, heart disease or a

family history of heart disease or diabetes, speak to a registered dietitian or health professional to discuss how much dietary cholesterol you should eat on a daily basis.

## Special Considerations

Triglycerides are another type of fat in your body. High blood triglyceride levels can also increase your heart disease risk. If you have high triglyceride levels:

- | Aim for a healthy body weight
- | Eat more omega-3 fats, especially from fatty fish and omega-3 enriched foods
- | Avoid sweetened food and beverages like cakes, donuts, soda pop and fruit drinks. Reduce alcohol intake to no more than 1 - 2 drinks per day or don't drink at all. Even one drink can increase triglycerides in some people.



## Additional Resources

- | Assess your BMI at [www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health/Assess-Yourself/Assess-Your-BMI.aspx](http://www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health/Assess-Yourself/Assess-Your-BMI.aspx)
- | Learn how to measure your waist size: [www.heartandstroke.com/site/c.ikIQLcMWJtE/b.3876195/](http://www.heartandstroke.com/site/c.ikIQLcMWJtE/b.3876195/)
- | Physical Activity Sheets: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pa-ap/04paap-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pa-ap/04paap-eng.php)
- | Health Canada - It's Your Health Series:
  - | What is a Food Guide Serving [www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/canada-food-guide/food-guide-basics/what-food-guide-serving.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/canada-food-guide/food-guide-basics/what-food-guide-serving.html)
  - | Reading Food Labels [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/using-utiliser/label-etiquet-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/using-utiliser/label-etiquet-eng.php)
- | Eating Guidelines for Omega-3 Fats: [www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=RbCR&id=JMbrUAM=&PreviewHandout=bA==](http://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=RbCR&id=JMbrUAM=&PreviewHandout=bA==)
- | Food Sources of Cholesterol

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[www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?  
Portal=UbY=&id=JMfrUAU=&PreviewHandout=bA==](http://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=UbY=&id=JMfrUAU=&PreviewHandout=bA==)

- | Food Sources of Soluble Fibre:

[www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?  
Portal=RbCR&id=JMzuXgE=&PreviewHandout=bA==](http://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=RbCR&id=JMzuXgE=&PreviewHandout=bA==)

- | Food Sources of Omega-3 [www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?  
Portal=RbCR&id=JMHpUQE=&PreviewHandout=bA==](http://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=RbCR&id=JMHpUQE=&PreviewHandout=bA==)

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