

# Heart Healthy Eating: Cholesterol



## Why This Diet is Important

The levels of cholesterol in your blood can affect your risk for developing heart disease. Choosing foods that are lower in saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol and which contain unsaturated fat and fibre, can help improve your cholesterol levels.

**Saturated fat** is found in animal-based foods, such as meat and high-fat dairy products, as well as in tropical fats, such as coconut and palm oil. Saturated fat tends to be solid at room temperature. **Trans fat** is found in commercially fried foods, hard margarine and some processed foods, such as store-bought cookies, commercially baked goods and crackers that are made with shortening or partially hydrogenated oils. Trans fat is also known as partially hydrogenated fat or vegetable shortening. **Cholesterol** is found only in animal foods such as meats, eggs and dairy products.

While saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol can have a bad effect on your blood cholesterol levels, unsaturated fat can help improve them. **Unsaturated fat**, which is found mostly in plant foods, such as canola oil, olive oil and nuts, can be used regularly in small amounts.

**Omega-3 fat**, an unsaturated fat found in ground flax seed and fish, is also a healthy fat and should be eaten more often.

## Choose Foods Lower in Saturated Fat, Trans Fat and Cholesterol such as:

- Lean cuts of meat
- Skinless poultry and fish
- Legumes (e.g. kidney beans, soya beans, chick peas, lentils)
- Egg whites
- Lean deli meats such as roast beef, ham, chicken and turkey
- Skim or 1% milk, yogurt with 1% milk fat or less, cheese with 15 -20% milk fat or less
- Non-fat or low-fat dairy coffee cream, sour cream and desserts
- Unsaturated oils such as canola, olive, peanut, safflower, soybean, sunflower or corn
- Non-hydrogenated soft margarine made from unsaturated oils

## Steps You Can Take

- Limit the lean meat and poultry you eat to 2 to 3 servings per day (a serving is 75 grams or 2 ½ oz, about the size of a deck of cards).
- Choose fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, Atlantic herring, sardines or trout at least twice a week. They are good sources of omega-3 fat.

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- Replace some of the meat in your meals with legumes or soy protein meat substitutes. They are low in saturated fat and legumes are high in fibre.
- Replace a whole egg with 2 egg whites in baking. If your cholesterol levels are normal you may eat up to 1 egg per day (or 7 eggs per week). If you have high blood cholesterol, limit your whole eggs to no more than 2 per week.
- Include healthy fats up to 30 to 45 mL (2 to 3 Tbsp) each day. This would include foods like non-hydrogenated margarine, oil, salad dressing and mayonnaise.
- Compare food labels to find out which products are lower in fat. If a product says 'low fat' on the package, it has less than 3 grams of fat per serving.
- Buy foods that contain little or no trans fat. Check the Nutrition Facts panel on the label or choose foods with no partially hydrogenated fat or vegetable shortening in the Ingredient List.
- Bake, poach, broil, grill, roast and barbeque food more often.
- Try to eat 4 to 5 servings of vegetables and 3 to 4 servings of fruit each day.
- Increase the amount of fibre in your diet by making at least half of your servings of grain products each day whole grains such as whole grain breads, high fibre cereals, brown rice and whole wheat pasta more often.
- Add ground flax seed or nuts to salads, baking or to your breakfast cereal.
- When eating out, ask questions about how the food is prepared before ordering.
- Dietary fibre, soy protein, nuts and fish oils may also be helpful in improving cholesterol levels. For more information, talk to your dietitian

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