



Top 10 Cholesterol-Fighting Foods

The best news about reaching healthy cholesterol levels? It's a delicious journey!

by Paula Rasich

Snack on nuts. Drizzle a little olive oil on your salad. Dine on salmon. Have a little chocolate--guilt-free! These, and more, eating strategies can help lower "bad-guy" LDLs, maintain "good-guy" HDLs, AND help you reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke.

What follows are *Prevention's* choices for the top cholesterol-fighting foods. If you're already eating plenty of them, keep up the good work. If not, begin adding them into your diet today.

Soy: The Smart, Delicious Alternative

Reducing saturated fat is the single most important dietary change you can make to cut blood cholesterol. Used as a replacement for meat and cheese, soy foods help your heart by slashing the amount of saturated fat that you eat.

Why is saturated fat so bad for your heart? The liver uses saturated fat to make cholesterol, so eating foods with too much saturated fat can increase cholesterol levels, especially low-density lipoproteins (LDL)---the bad cholesterol. Saturated fats are usually found in animal products such as whole milk, cream, butter, and cheese, and meats, such as beef, lamb and pork. There are some plant-based saturated fats you should avoid too, notably palm kernel oil, coconut oil, and vegetable shortening.

Beyond replacing saturated fat, research suggests that compounds in soy foods called isoflavones may also work to reduce LDL cholesterol.

Eat Some Today

Not familiar with soy foods? The basics include tofu, soy nuts, soy flour, and enriched soymilk. Great-tasting, protein-rich meat alternatives include soy sausage, and breaded cutlets and nuggets that taste like chicken. Crumbled soy--an alternative to ground meat--works well in chili, burritos, lasagna, soups, and casseroles. Add tofu to chili, eggs, or casseroles. It absorbs the flavor of whatever you're cooking. You'll find many soy products in the produce section of the supermarket.

What about soy supplements? Research shows that isoflavone supplements alone don't work. To lower cholesterol, you need the whole soybean with its unique protein, phytates, and isoflavones, which may all act together.

Get This Much

The FDA recommends getting at least 25 grams of soy protein each day. Consuming 25 grams of soy protein daily lowers high cholesterol.

Beans: The High Fiber Solution

Except for your morning wheat bran, no food is more fiber-rich than beans. And beans are especially high in cholesterol-lowering soluble fiber. Eating a cup of any type of beans a day---particularly kidney, navy, pinto, black, chickpea, or butter beans--can lower cholesterol by as much as 10% in 6 weeks.

Soluble fiber forms a gel in water that helps bind acids and cholesterol in the intestinal tract, preventing their re-absorption into the body. This may be why soluble fiber helps to lower cholesterol levels (and decreases the risk of heart disease). Soluble fiber is also found in oats and oat bran, barley, brown rice, beans, apples, carrots, and most other fruits and vegetables.

Eat Some Today

Keep your cupboards stocked with canned beans of all kinds: black, white, kidney, fat-free



refried, etc. (as well as instant bean soups). You'll always have the makings of a delicious, healthful dinner on hand. Beans add protein and fiber to any dish and can be used in salads, stuffed baked potatoes, veggie chili, or pureed for sandwich spreads. And since they come in cans, beans are handy to use. But remember to rinse canned beans first--they're packed in a high-sodium liquid.

Get This Much

Eat beans five or more times a week. For the greatest health benefits, both the FDA and the National Cancer Institute recommend that adults get 25 to 30 g of fiber each day.

Salmon: Amazing Heart-Friendly Fat

Research has shown certain types of fat actually protect against high cholesterol. Omega-3 fatty acids--found in salmon and other cold-water fish--help lower "bad" LDL cholesterol, raise "good" HDL cholesterol, and lower triglycerides.

Salmon is an excellent source of protein because it is high in omega-3 fatty acids called EPA and DHA that are good for your heart while low in cholesterol and saturated fat.

Eat Some Today

To get the most omega-3s, choose salmon, white albacore tuna canned in water, rainbow trout, anchovies, herring, sardines, and mackerel.

Get This Much

The American Heart Association now recommends eating at least two servings of fish every week, preferably fatty fish, by far the richest sources of fish-oil omega-3s.

Avocado: Healthy Fats, Lower Cholesterol

Avocados are a great source of heart-healthy monounsaturated fat—a type of fat that may actually help to raise levels of HDL ("good" cholesterol) while lowering levels of LDL ("bad" cholesterol). And these delectable green orbs pack more of the cholesterol-smashing beta-sitosterol (a beneficial plant-based fat) than any other fruit. Beta-sitosterol reduces the amount of cholesterol absorbed from food. So the combination of beta-sitosterol and monounsaturated fat makes the avocado an excellent cholesterol buster.

Eat Some Today

Avocado is a bit high in calories. Your best strategy: Use this luscious veggie in place of another high-fat food or condiment.

Get This Much

The American Heart Association recommends that you get up to 15% of your daily calories from monounsaturated fats like those contained in avocados, but some heart experts recommend an even greater percentage. (In an 1,800-calorie diet, 15% translates into 30 grams per day.) FYI: A whole avocado has about 300 calories and 30 g fat.

Garlic: The ancient herb for a heart health

For thousands of years, garlic has been used in nearly every culture in the world, and not just to repel evil. Its nutritional value and flavor have made it a kitchen staple. Ancient Egyptians ate garlic for stamina; in modern times, garlic has been found to lower cholesterol, prevent blood clots, reduce blood pressure, and protect against infections. Now research has found that it helps stop artery-clogging plaque at its earliest stage (called nanoplaque). How? Garlic keeps individual cholesterol particles from sticking to artery walls.

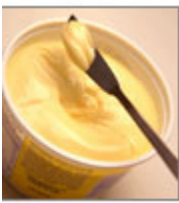
Eat Some Today

Next time you hit the supermarket, pick up a tub of freshly peeled garlic cloves, and challenge yourself to make sure it's gone before the "best by" date. Chop up and toss on pizza, in soups, or on side dishes.

Get This Much

To reap benefits, try for 2 to 4 fresh cloves a day.





Spinach: The heart healthy green giant

Spinach contains lots of lutein, the sunshine-yellow pigment found in dark green leafy vegetables and egg yolks. Lutein already has a "golden" reputation for guarding against age-related macular degeneration, a leading cause of blindness. Now research suggests that just a 1/2 cup of a lutein-rich food daily also guards against heart attacks by helping artery walls "shrug off" cholesterol invaders that cause clogging.

Eat Some Today

Look for 9-oz bags of baby spinach leaves that you can pop in the microwave (ready in 3 minutes). Top with 2 tablespoons of Parmesan and 1 tablespoon of toasted sunflower seeds. Add a roll, and you've got a heavenly low-cal dinner for one.

Get This Much: Spinach is the richest source of lutein. Shoot for a 1/2 cup a day.

Cholesterol-Cutting Margarines: Best spreads for your breads

Two margarines are proven to help lower your cholesterol numbers: Take Control and Benecol. They do so by blocking the absorption of the cholesterol contained in your food and bile.

Take Control margarine is made with plant sterols that are proven to lower both total and LDL cholesterol by up to 14%. The plant stanols in Benecol margarine work the same way. Both the National Cholesterol Education Program and the American Heart Association recommend these margarines.

Eat Some Today

Spread these margarines on your toast or bagel in the morning or for a mid-day snack. The only side effect is reduced beta-carotene absorption. To compensate, make sure you eat extra carrots, spinach, sweet red peppers, or sweet potatoes.

Get This Much

In studies, three servings a day of Benecol helped drop total blood cholesterol by an average of 10% and LDL cholesterol by 14%. Take Control helped drop total cholesterol an average of 6 to 8% and LDL by 7 to 10% with one to two servings a day. Check labels for serving size.

Walnuts, Cashews, and Almonds: Go (mixed) nuts!

A moderate-fat diet that's rich in the healthy monounsaturated fats found in nuts may actually be twice as good for your heart as a low-fat diet. Nuts also have vitamin E, magnesium, copper, and phytochemicals that have been linked to heart health. And walnuts are also rich in omega-3s. People who eat nuts regularly have less heart disease and other illnesses than people who don't. The heart-healthy monounsaturated fats they contain are also better for your joints than the polyunsaturated fats found in corn and safflower oils.

Eat Some Today

The key is moderation: Nuts are high in calories. Keep a jar of chopped nuts in your fridge, and sprinkle 2 tablespoons a day on cereal, veggies, salads, or yogurt. Or add them to your diet by sprinkling chopped nuts on stir-fries. Almonds, hazelnuts, or walnuts can be added to pilafs. Make a trail mix with your favorite nuts, seeds and dried fruit.

Get This Much

Aim for 2 tablespoons of chopped nuts five times a week, or a small handful as a snack 3-4 times a week.

Tea: The Hot and Cool Superdrink

Tea, whether it's iced or hot, delivers a blast of antioxidant compounds. Studies prove that tea helps to keep blood vessels relaxed and prevent blood clots. Flavonoids, the major antioxidants in tea, have been shown to prevent the oxidation of LDL cholesterol that leads to plaque formation on artery walls. These powerful antioxidants may even reduce cholesterol





and even lower blood pressure.

Drink some today

Enjoy a cup of hot or iced tea. Although convenience iced teas still have high antioxidant levels, most homemade iced tea (both hot-brewed and fridge teas) have even more antioxidants. So, if you want the very max, make your own.

Get This Much

A cup of hot tea actually contains more antioxidants than a serving of any fruit or vegetable. Both green and black teas have high antioxidant levels. Enjoy at least one cup of tea every day.

Chocolate: The Sweet Heart Bonus

Want to help your heart the next time you indulge in chocolate candy? Choose the dark or bittersweet kind. Compared to milk chocolate, it has more than three times as many antioxidants. These flavonoid antioxidants work to keep blood platelets from sticking together and may even help keep your arteries unclogged. Milk chocolate is good too, having as much antioxidant power as red wine. And what about white chocolate? Sorry, it has no flavonoids at all.

Eat Some Today

The levels of flavonoids in chocolate vary, depending on where it is grown and handled and how it is processed. Researchers have been studying a variety of chocolate, developed by Mars, Inc., with guaranteed high-flavonoid levels. You can find it now in Mars Dove bars. To control the calories, buy Dove dark chocolate Promises. Indulge in one flavorful, high-flavonoid morsel daily, for just 42 calories and 2.6 g of fat.

Get This Much

Research shows that about an ounce of chocolate a day increases good cholesterol and prevents bad cholesterol from oxidizing.