

# A Healthy Lifestyle to Improve Cholesterol and Triglycerides

The information and tips in this resource can help you move toward a heart healthy lifestyle.

## Blood fats

### Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a waxy material found in your blood. Most of it is made in your body by your liver; some comes from the food you eat.

Our bodies need some cholesterol, but high levels of cholesterol can build up and block blood vessels. A blocked blood vessel can lead to a heart attack or stroke.

There are 2 main types of cholesterol in your blood:

#### 1. Healthy cholesterol: High density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol

- HDL moves some cholesterol out of your blood so it can be removed from your body.
- Higher blood levels of HDL are healthy for your heart.

#### 2. Lousy cholesterol: Low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol

- LDL leaves cholesterol in the walls of blood vessels. Over time, the vessels can become blocked, and may cause a heart attack or stroke.
- Higher blood levels of LDL are unhealthy for your heart.

### Triglycerides

- Triglycerides are a type of fat in your blood. They're made in your body from the sugar, fat, and alcohol you eat and drink.
- High blood levels of triglycerides increase your risk for heart attack and stroke.

## Fats from foods

Eating more heart healthy foods:

- can help lower your LDL cholesterol and triglycerides
- may raise your HDL cholesterol levels
- can help to lower your risk of heart disease

**For heart health, choose small amounts of monounsaturated, polyunsaturated, and omega-3 fats.**

### Monounsaturated fats

#### Oils:

- avocado
- canola
- olive
- peanut

#### Other sources:

- almonds
- avocados
- hazelnuts
- olives
- peanuts
- pecans
- pistachios



#### Spreads:

- Non-hydrogenated (soft) margarines and nut butters made from foods in the lists above.

### Polyunsaturated fats

#### Oils:

- flaxseed
- safflower
- soybean
- sunflower
- walnut

#### Nuts and seeds:

- chia seeds
- hemp seeds
- pecans
- pumpkin seeds
- sunflower seeds
- sesame seeds
- walnuts

#### Spreads:

- Non-hydrogenated (soft) margarines and nut butters made from foods in the lists above.

## Omega-3 fats

**These polyunsaturated fats protect blood vessels and can lower blood triglycerides.** The best sources are fatty fish:

- herring
- salmon
- trout
- mackerel
- sardines
- tuna

Plant foods with omega-3 fats are healthy, but they don't decrease your heart disease risk as much as fatty fish. Plant foods with omega-3 fats are:

- canola oil
- flaxseed oil
- walnuts or walnut oil
- chia seeds
- ground flaxseed

## Tips to get healthy fats

- Every day, include a small amount (2–3 Tbsp or 30–45 mL) of olive oil, canola oil, peanut oil, sunflower oil, or soft non-hydrogenated margarines made from these oils.
- Use a soft non-hydrogenated margarine with 0 grams trans fat.
- Eat fatty fish at least 2 times a week.
- Choose up to ¼ cup (60 mL) of nuts as a snack or to add to a salad.
- Add ground flax, chia, or hemp seeds to yogurt, hot cereals, salads, or baked goods like breads or muffins.



**For heart health, eat less saturated and trans fats.**

## Saturated fats

**The foods below are higher in saturated fats:**

- bacon, sausage, bologna, smokies, wieners
- butter, lard
- cheese with more than 20% M.F.
- ground beef, regular
- higher fat milk: 2%, 3.25 % (homogenized)
- ice cream
- meats with fat marbling
- tropical oils such as palm or coconut oil
- yogurt with 2% M.F. or higher

Read the Nutrition Facts tables on packaged food. Choose foods with less saturated fat.

## Trans fat: Avoid, if possible

Read the Nutrition Facts table and ingredient list on food labels to avoid or limit foods with trans fats:

- hard margarines
- shortening
- foods with hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils in the ingredient list, such as
  - high fat baked goods: cakes, donuts, cookies, and store-bought muffins
  - microwave popcorn

## Choose higher fibre foods

Eating foods higher in fibre may lower your risk for heart disease. Higher fibre foods include:

- whole grain foods—breads, hot or cold cereals, crackers; look for *whole grain* in the ingredient list on food packages
- whole grains like barley, millet, quinoa, bulgur, and oats
- dried cooked beans, peas, and lentils; use these instead of meat at some of your meals
- vegetables and fruits; choose vegetables and fruit at every meal and snack

**Some fibres, called *soluble fibres*, can lower LDL cholesterol.** There are 2 main sources of soluble fibre:

- beta-glucan – found in oats and barley
- psyllium – found in cereal with psyllium or psyllium husk added; read ingredient lists on food packages

Some other foods also have soluble fibre:

- apples
- eggplant
- pears
- broccoli
- figs
- rye bread
- Brussels sprouts
- green peas
- sweet potatoes
- oranges
- turnips
- dried, cooked beans, peas, lentils

Try to eat foods with soluble fibre every day.

## Eat foods with soy protein

Soy protein can lower LDL cholesterol. Try to eat soy foods often. One serving is:

- fortified soy beverage – 1 cup (250 mL)
- soy nuts – ¼ cup (60 mL)
- tofu – ¾ cup (175 mL)
- edamame, shelled – ½ cup (125 mL)



Try to eat soy foods often.

## Eat foods with plant sterols

Plant sterols lower LDL cholesterol and triglycerides. Our everyday food and drink choices don't provide enough plant sterols to help lower cholesterol.

There are small amounts of plant sterols in foods like nuts, seeds, oils, fruit, and beans. Plant sterols are added to some foods such as soft margarines and juices. Ask your dietitian if you want to know more about plant sterols or plant sterol supplements.



## Tips for lowering triglycerides

If you have high triglycerides, the lifestyle tips below can help you lower them. Ask your dietitian or doctor for more information.

### Healthy weight

If you have extra weight, losing even 5–10% of your weight may help to lower your triglycerides.

For example, a 200 lb (91 kg) person would aim to lose 10–20 lbs (4.5–9 kg).

### Eat fewer foods and drinks with added sugar

Limit sugars and sweets:

- candies
- chocolates
- fruit-flavoured drinks
- high calorie baked goods
- honey
- jams and jellies
- juices
- molasses
- regular pop
- sugar, brown and white
- sweet desserts
- sweetened teas and coffees
- syrups

### Avoid trans fat

Look for foods with 0 grams trans fat in the Nutrition Facts table on the food label. Eat more of the healthy fats listed on pages 1 and 2.

### Eat more fatty fish

Eat 2 servings a week of fatty fish like the ones listed in the *Omega-3 fats* section on page 2.



Some people with high triglycerides may be asked by their healthcare provider to take fish oil supplements. Talk to your healthcare provider about how much is right for you.

### Alcohol

Alcohol can increase your triglycerides. Your doctor or dietitian may ask you to cut down on alcohol, or to stop drinking alcohol.

## Be active everyday

Activity helps to lower your risk for heart disease and other diseases. It may help lower your LDL cholesterol and triglycerides, and may help increase your HDL cholesterol. Activity also makes you stronger, and gives you a better quality of life.

- Be active for at least 30 minutes, 5–7 days a week.
- Start with a few minutes a day and build up to 30 minutes.
- Aim for at least 150 minutes (2½ hours) a week of activities that make your heart beat faster, like brisk walking, swimming, bike riding, sports, or running. You should breathe faster but still be able to talk.
- On at least 2 days a week do activities to strengthen muscle and bone such as:
  - heavy yard work
  - lifting weights
  - yoga
- A pedometer is a device that counts how many steps you take. Use a pedometer, and write your steps in a journal. Review your journal to watch your progress and stay on track.

### **As well as being active 150 minutes a week, it's important to break up sitting time.**

Sitting time is time watching TV, playing video games, using the computer at work or home, reading, and doing homework. Breaking up sitting time can lower your risk for disease. Below are some tips:

- get up and stretch or move during commercials when watching TV
- stand and move every 30 minutes at work
- walk to see a co-worker instead of emailing or phoning
- stand and walk around whenever you talk on the phone
- take the long way to the bathroom at work

If you haven't been active for a long time, talk to your doctor about your activity plans before you start.

## Cut down or quit smoking

If you smoke, try to quit or at least cut back. Smoking and chewing tobacco products greatly increase your risk of heart disease and stroke.

You can find help on the [www.albertaquits.ca](http://www.albertaquits.ca) web site. You can also ask your healthcare provider for help quitting or cutting down on smoking.

## Next steps

### Goal setting

This resource includes lifestyle choices that can help you lower your risk of heart disease. Change can be hard, especially if we try to make too many changes at once.

When you're ready to make a change, it can help to set a goal, and break your goal into smaller steps. You're more likely to reach smaller goals.



Ask your healthcare provider if you'd like support with goal setting.

### Check with your healthcare provider

Your healthcare provider may do blood tests to check the amount of cholesterol and triglycerides in your blood.

Blood fat targets aren't the same for everyone. Your doctor or healthcare provider can explain the HDL, LDL, and triglyceride levels that are best for you.

Some people need medicine to help improve their cholesterol and lower their risk of heart disease.

Medicine works best if it's combined with heart healthy lifestyle choices.