

Lowering Your Cholesterol

With TLC



High blood cholesterol plays a major role in the development heart disease: the higher your blood cholesterol level, the greater your risk.

September is National Cholesterol Education Awareness Month, which makes it an opportune time to take steps to protect your health and manage your blood cholesterol level.

TLC stands for *Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes*. It's part of the *National Cholesterol Education Program*, from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the National Institutes of Health and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. The TLC Program combines healthy lifestyle recommendations to promote heart health. Speak with your healthcare provider about what additional steps you should take to lower your risk for heart disease.

SET Your Goals

Studies have proven that lowering LDL “bad” cholesterol can prevent heart attacks and reduce deaths from heart disease. In addition, following the TLC Program has been shown to reduce risk for heart disease independent of cholesterol levels.

A lipid profile is a fasting blood test that measures the amount and type of cholesterol and triglycerides found in the blood. According to guidelines from the TLC Program, the optimal levels for lipids are:

Total Cholesterol	200 mg/dL or less
LDL Cholesterol	100 mg/dL or less
HDL Cholesterol	40 mg/dL or above (60 mg/dL and above is ideal)
Triglycerides	150 mg/dL or less

Speak with your healthcare provider about your specific goals. Your goals may differ based on your family or personal medical history.

EAT the TLC Way

The TLC way of eating is one that is low in saturated fat, *trans* fat and dietary cholesterol and supports weight management. The TLC goals recommend:

- Less than 7 percent of your daily calories from saturated fat
- Less than 200 milligrams (mg) a day of cholesterol
- 25 to 35 percent of daily calories from total fat
- Therapeutic diet options, such as plant stanols or sterols and soluble fiber, for more LDL lowering
- Appropriate calories to reach or maintain a healthy weight
- At least 30 minutes of a moderate intensity physical activity daily or almost daily

Saturated Fat, *Trans* Fat and Cholesterol

Saturated fat raises blood cholesterol more than anything else in the diet. *Trans* fat raises cholesterol similarly to saturated fat, but it makes up far less of the American diet. Dietary cholesterol is only found in animal products, so limiting your intake and choosing only low-fat products is vital.

1. Choose only the leanest cuts of meat, and limit your meat, poultry and fish intake to 5 ounces daily. Pass on fatty cuts of meat, organ meats, sausage, lard, bacon, regular cold cuts and all deep-fried foods. Eat shrimp only occasionally due to its moderate cholesterol content.
2. Select milk and other dairy products made from 1% or fat-free milk. Pass on whole and 2% milk products, including butter and cream.
3. Read labels carefully, and choose low-fat foods that contain 0 to 3 grams of total fat per serving. Look for foods that contain 1 gram of saturated fat or less and 0 grams of *trans* fat per serving.
4. Use egg whites or egg substitutes instead of whole eggs, and substitute liquid vegetable oils (canola or olive oil) and soft margarines in place of hard margarine or shortening.
5. Limit foods containing partially hydrogenated vegetable oils, and limit cakes, cookies, crackers, pies, donuts, French fries and frozen convenience foods made with partially hydrogenated oils.

MONOUNSATURATED, Polyunsaturated and Omega 3 Fats

When used instead of saturated fat, monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats help to lower blood cholesterol levels. Omega-3 fats protect the heart in other ways, including preventing blood clots from forming and inflammation from affecting artery walls.

1. **MONOUNSATURATED FAT** is found in foods from plants, including avocado, nuts and olive, canola, sunflower and peanut oils. Select soft margarines, salad dressings and other products made from monounsaturated fats, and use moderately depending on your calorie needs.
2. **POLYUNSATURATED FAT** is found in foods from plants, including many kinds of nuts, fatty fish and safflower, sunflower, corn, soybean and cottonseed oils. Select soft margarines, salad dressings and other products made from polyunsaturated fats, and use moderately depending on your calorie needs.

3. **OMEGA-3 FATS** are found in walnuts, flaxseed, canola and soybean oils and fatty fish, such as salmon, tuna, mackerel and sardines. Strive for at least 3 baked, broiled or grilled fish meals per week, and eat other omega-3 rich foods regularly. (Pregnant women and nursing mothers should avoid some types of fish and eat types lower in mercury. For more information, visit the FDA web site at www.cfsan.fda.gov.)

SOLUBLE FIBER

Choose a diet rich in whole grains, fresh fruits, vegetables, soy and legumes (dry beans and peas). Soluble fiber helps to lower blood cholesterol levels. Strive for at least 5 to 10 grams of soluble fiber daily. Good sources of soluble fiber include barley, oats, psyllium, apples, bananas, berries, citrus fruits, nectarines, peaches, pears, plums, prunes, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, carrots and legumes.

1. **EAT 2 TO 4 SERVINGS OF FRUITS DAILY**—preferably fresh with skins. Emphasize fruits rich in soluble fiber.
2. **CHOOSE 3 TO 5 SERVINGS OF VEGETABLES DAILY.** Select from fresh, frozen or no-added-salt canned varieties.
3. **SELECT AT LEAST 3 TO 6 SERVINGS OF WHOLE GRAINS** and whole starchy vegetables daily. Choose whole grain breads, cereals and crackers, brown rice, barley, potatoes or other starchy vegetables with skin and pass on refined and processed starches.

PLANT STANOLS OR STEROLS

Plant stanols and sterols occur naturally in small amounts in many plants. These soluble fiber-rich foods help block the absorption of cholesterol from the digestive tract, which helps to lower LDL cholesterol without affecting HDL “good” cholesterol or triglyceride levels. Soy and flax-containing foods are rich in plant stanols and sterols. In addition to natural sources, food manufacturers are now adding stanols and sterols to specialty foods, such as certain margarines, juices, yogurt and other foods.

1. Use stanol and sterol-rich foods as part of your cholesterol-reducing lifestyle. Studies show that a daily intake of about 2 grams of either stanols or sterols can quickly reduce LDL cholesterol by about 5 to 15 percent.
2. Try to include soy-based and flax-containing foods in your diet every day.



LIMIT ALCOHOL, SUGAR AND CALORIES to Lose Weight and Lower Triglycerides

While some studies suggest that small amounts of alcohol may help protect some people against heart disease, drinking too much alcohol can cause serious health problems. If you don't drink now, don't start.

1. Always discuss alcohol use with your healthcare provider. If you drink, limit to no more than one drink a day for women and two a day for men.

Foods high in simple carbohydrates can raise triglyceride levels. Cut back on foods high in sugar and refined starches to lower triglyceride levels and lose weight.

1. Decrease your intake of fruit juice, and cut down on sweets, sugar, desserts, candy and other foods that are high in sugar.
2. Reduce sources of excess simple carbohydrates such as fat-free and regular crackers, cookies and other desserts, snack foods and sugar-containing beverages.
3. Drink only calorie-free beverages—exclude regular soda pop and other sweetened beverages.

ADD PHYSICAL ACTIVITY to Your Daily Routine

Exercise helps you lose weight, lower LDL cholesterol and blood glucose levels and raise HDL cholesterol. Maintaining a healthy weight, combined with regular physical activity, also lowers triglyceride levels. Get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity daily or almost daily. Walk, bike, swim, jog, dance or take an exercise class.

1. Learn to add more activity within your daily routine. Take the stairs instead of the elevator, play actively with your children and take up a sport or other recreational activity.
2. Thirty-minutes of moderate exercises expends about 200 calories per day. Moderate exercise means you should notice your heart rate rising, notice your breathing increasing and break a sweat for at least 30 minutes. Speak with your healthcare provider before beginning any exercise program.

Reference:

Your Guide to Lowering Cholesterol with TLC. U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, National Institutes of Health and National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. NIH Publication No. 06-5235. December 2005

For more information on cholesterol and heart health, log onto your Member Web site at www.highmark.com and choose your service region. Click on “Health Topics” to search the Healthwise® Knowledgebase. If your company is participating in the Lifestyle ReturnsSM program, you may be able to get credit toward Lifestyle Returns by using the Healthwise Knowledgebase.