



10 Tricks to Lower Cholesterol Naturally

By now, you know that people with diabetes have a higher-than-average risk of developing coronary heart disease, so it's especially important to maintain normal levels of cholesterol, an umbrella term for the different types of fat found in your blood. Good news: Drugs aren't the only option for keeping cholesterol and triglyceride levels in check. Some foods and supplements work almost as well as meds—and without any risk of side effects. Check out these tips to help you lower cholesterol naturally.

1. Add More Fiber

Soluble fiber binds to cholesterol, and helps your body get rid of it before it can cause any damage. Opt for sources of fiber that are lower-carb, including leafy greens like spinach, tomatoes, squash, and eggplant rather than grains like oats, which can spike blood sugar levels. It's always best to get fiber from whole foods, but supplements are a great way to get what you need. Talk to your healthcare team or pharmacist about what fits your needs.

Suggestion: Swap out your carb-heavy Sunday lasagna for this heart-healthy eggplant lasagna recipe. Or, for a refreshing side dish during the week, try this zucchini mint salad.

2. Eat Fish

Coldwater fish, such as salmon and herring, contain omega-3 fats—the heart-healthiest fat you can eat. Omega-3s may help reduce the risk of arrhythmias (abnormal heartbeats, which can lead to sudden death), may lower triglyceride levels, slow the growth of atherosclerotic plaque, and reduce blood pressure slightly. Buy wild-caught fish for the most health benefits.

Tip: The healthiest way to cook fish is to steam, sauté, grill, or bake it. Avoid deep-fried fish or seafood, because the bad cancels out the good.

3. Avoid Trans Fats

Due to the overwhelming evidence linking trans fats to high cholesterol and heart disease, there has been a lot of public pressure to force the food industry to use alternatives. This is definitely a win for public health, but we still need to be vigilant. The director of nutrition at Brigham and Women's Hospital, Kathy McManus, recommends having a conversation with your healthcare providers about the foods you eat to identify any sources of trans fats in your diet, so you can make healthier substitutions. Make sure you check food labels for phrases like “hydrogenated” to avoid trans fats in packaged food—or, better yet, skip the packaged and processed foods for the fresh stuff.

4. Go nuts

Eating a handful of nuts—especially almonds—each day can lower cholesterol, triglycerides, and blood sugar. Pistachios, pecans, walnuts, and macadamias are also top choices, but all nuts are good for you. Make your own trail mix, and keep it handy in plastic bags you can take with you on the go. Just remember to keep an eye on portion size, because nuts are calorie-dense.

5. Eat an Avocado a Day

Yes, they're high in calories, but avocados contain the same good fat that's found in olive oil. Plus, avocados are super rich in fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Eating an avocado a day can lower cholesterol levels as much as certain drugs do.

6. Use olive oil

Rich in heart-healthy, monounsaturated fat, olive oil can lower cholesterol levels, reduce the risk of blood clots, and even help with blood-sugar regulation. Avoid highly processed vegetable oils as much as you can and stick to cold-processed and virgin oils.

Tip: When you steam vegetables or eat salad, drizzle on extra-virgin oil for its delicious, nutty flavor and health benefits.

7. Take a Hike—Or At Least Go for a Daily Walk

You'll be surprised at the results. Most people aren't motivated to work out at a gym—yet something as simple as going for regular walks can lower cholesterol and triglyceride levels. Try to increase your pace and distance over several weeks. Plus, losing as little as 5 percent of your body weight can help improve your cholesterol levels...and small changes add up!

Tip: Look for little ways to incorporate more activity into your daily routine. Try taking the stairs instead of the elevator, or parking at the far end of the parking lot when running errands.

8. If You Drink Alcohol, Do it in Moderation

Too much alcohol can add unwanted calories to your day, and can also lead to health complications, including cardiovascular issues. According to the experts: for women of all ages, moderation means no more than one drink a day, while for men it means two drinks a day until the age of 65, and one drink a day past 65.

9. Consider Red Yeast Rice

Red yeast rice is a traditional Chinese product used in foods and medicines. Some red yeast products contain monacolin K, which has the same chemical composition as some cholesterol-lowering drugs. Studies suggest that red yeast rice can lower cholesterol, but it's also important to note that some people may experience side effects. Before trying red yeast rice, talk to your doctor to give him or her a full picture of what you're doing to manage your health. This will help you avoid any interactions or side effects.

10. Commit to quit

Quitting smoking can improve your HDL cholesterol levels—and the health benefits extend far beyond cholesterol. You can cut your risk of heart disease in half after quitting for one year.

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