

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a waxy substance that's found naturally in the body and is key to keeping every cell wall working well. The body uses cholesterol to make vital chemicals such as vitamin D and some hormones. Most cholesterol is made in the liver and a small amount comes from the diet.

Cholesterol may become a problem when the level in your blood is too high. If you have more cholesterol than your body needs, the result can be a build-up of fatty deposits in your arteries. High cholesterol is a risk factor for heart disease.



How to remember "good" versus "bad" cholesterol

- **HDL** – high density lipoprotein – **hauls** excess cholesterol to the liver to be removed from the body. Therefore, keep this "good" cholesterol **high**.
- **LDL** – low density lipoprotein – **leaves** plaque deposits in the artery walls. Therefore, keep this "bad" cholesterol **low**.

How can I improve my cholesterol levels?

Follow a heart healthy diet and lifestyle to help you manage your cholesterol levels and lower your overall risk of heart disease.

- Eat a variety of foods from *Canada's Food Guide*, including vegetables, fruit, whole grains, lower-fat milk products, lean meat and lower-fat meat alternatives.
- Include foods that are fortified with plant sterols.
- Limit your intake of saturated and trans fats.
- Stay active with at least 30-60 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week.
- Consult your health care professional for advice on all areas of your cholesterol-lowering plan.

The chart below offers some suggestions to incorporate into a heart healthy diet that is higher in fibre, vegetables and fruit, and limits saturated and trans fats.

Foods	Choices to include more often	Choices to limit
Vegetables and fruit (7–10 servings per day)*		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dark leafy green vegetables (broccoli, romaine lettuce and spinach) • Dark orange vegetables (carrots, winter squash, sweet potato) • Fresh or frozen vegetables and fruit • Vegetables steamed, baked or stir-fried 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetables and fruit prepared with added fat, sugar or salt • Deep-fried vegetables, such as french fries or onion rings
Grain products (6–8 servings per day)*		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grains such as barley, brown rice, oats, quinoa and wild rice • Whole grain breads, oatmeal, whole-wheat pasta or couscous • Grain products that are lower in fat, sugar or salt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-fat granola cereals • Cakes, pies, pastries, cookies and doughnuts • High-fat muffins or scones • Regular microwave, cheese or buttered popcorn • Jumbo muffins or bagels • White bread
Milk and alternatives (2 servings per day)*		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skim, 1% or 2% milk • Fortified soy beverages • Plain or fruit yogurt (1% M.F. or less) • Cottage cheese (2% M.F. or less) • Lower-fat cheeses (7% M.F. or less) • Ice milk, frozen yogurt • Low-fat sour cream 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole milk • Regular yogurt • High-fat cheese (15% M.F. or more) • Full-fat cream cheese • Cream • Ice cream • Regular sour cream
Meat and alternatives (2–3 servings per day)*		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish, such as char, herring, mackerel, salmon, sardines and trout • Shellfish • Chicken, turkey (skin removed) • Lean meat (beef, pork, veal, lamb) and meat alternatives with little or no added fat or salt • Meat alternatives such as beans, lentils and tofu • Peanut or nut butters • Shelled nuts and seeds • Eggs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatty cuts – prime rib, regular ground beef, bacon, spareribs • Duck, goose, self-basting turkeys or those with added fat • Breaded and fried fish • Fish packed in oil, caviar (fish roe) • Luncheon meats, wieners, sausages • Organ meats
Oils and fats (30–45 mL or 2–3 tbsp per day)*		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calorie-reduced margarine with plant sterols • Soft non-hydrogenated margarine (for use in baking and cooking) • Vegetable oils (canola, olive and sunflower) • Light mayonnaise • Oil/vinegar-based or lower-fat salad dressings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Butter, lard, hard margarines, shortenings • Cream substitutes, flavoured coffee creamers • Potato chips • Deep-fried foods

*As recommended in *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*.