Allina Health

Cholesterol and Fat

Cholesterol

Cholesterol naturally occurs in your body. It is a white, wax-like substance found in your cell walls, hormones and bile acids. The amount of cholesterol in your body is determined by your genetics (family history), food choices, weight and activity level.

When blood cholesterol is too high, it forms tiny, hardened deposits of plaque that sticks to the insides of your arteries. These deposits can limit or stop blood flow and cause a heart attack or stroke. There are two kinds of cholesterol, sometimes called "good" and "bad."

- **HDL**: High density lipoprotein, or HDL, is also called the "good" cholesterol. HDL is believed to help remove "bad" cholesterol from your body, so the more you have — the higher your HDL levels — the better. HDL levels should be:
  - — 40 mg/dL or higher (men)
  - — 50 mg/dL or higher (women).
- **LDL**: Low density lipoprotein, or LDL, is also called the "bad" cholesterol. LDL carries cholesterol from your liver to other tissues in your body, and forms deposits in blood vessel walls. Too much cholesterol can build up in your blood vessels and cause heart disease. It is best for LDL levels to be less than 100 mg/dL*.

To lower your cholesterol:

- — get physical activity (walking, biking, swimming, hiking) for 30 to 45 minutes each day most days of the week
- — lose weight (if you are overweight)
- — do not smoke
- — eat less saturated fat
- — eat as little trans fat as possible
- — eat more fiber (25 to 35 grams each day).

Triglycerides

Triglycerides are a type of fat. They come from the food you eat. They are also produced from any extra calories and stored in fat cells. High levels can be caused by alcohol use or high sugar intake.

Triglyceride levels should be less than 150 mg/dL. High triglycerides (150 mg/dL or more) and low HDL are linked with increased risk of heart disease.

Fat

Fats are an essential nutrient your body needs. But, having too many unhealthful fats can increase your blood cholesterol level and risk of heart disease. Saturated fats and trans fatty acids (trans fats) tend to raise cholesterol levels. Polyunsaturated, monounsaturated fats and omega-3 fatty acids tend to lower cholesterol levels.

***Guidelines for LDL are based on your overall risk for heart disease. If you have diabetes or heart disease, consider taking a statin medicine to protect your arteries. Talk with your health care provider about your LDL goal.**

(over)

Types of fats

- **Monounsaturated** fat, in appropriate amounts, may reduce LDL levels. Monounsaturated fats include olive, peanut and canola oils. These fats are liquid at room temperature. Avocados and most nuts are also high in monounsaturated fats.
- **Polyunsaturated** fat can help reduce blood cholesterol, if you use them in place of saturated fats. Polyunsaturated fats usually come from vegetables, seeds or nuts such as corn, safflower, soybean, sunflower, cottonseed, olive and sesame seed oils. These fats are liquid at room temperature.
- **Omega-3 fatty acids** are polyunsaturated fats. They include flaxseed, flaxseed oil, soybean, soybean oil, canola oil, walnuts and fatty fish (such as salmon, mackerel, herring and trout). Omega-3 fatty acids may help lower your triglyceride levels.
- **Saturated** fats are found in animal products such as butter, cheese, whole milk, ice cream and fatty meats. They are also found in some vegetable products, such as coconut, palm and palm kernel oil. Saturated fats can raise blood cholesterol levels. Saturated fats are solid at room temperature.
- **Trans fatty acids** result from a chemical process known as hydrogenation. Trans fats can raise LDL cholesterol levels and add to heart disease. Shortening, partially hydrogenated vegetable oil and hydrogenated vegetable oils are examples of trans fats.

  Trans fats can be found in commercial baked goods and foods served at fast food restaurants. Avoid foods made with "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil" or "vegetable shortening." Trans fatty acids occur naturally in some foods such as meat and milk, and are thought to be less harmful.

Daily Calories	Total Fat Grams*	Saturated Fat Grams**
1,200	33 to 47	7 to 8
1,500	42 to 58	8 to 10
1,800	50 to 50	10 to 12
2,000	56 to 78	11 to 13
2,200	61 to 86	12 to 15
2,500	69 to 97	14 to 17

*** 25 to 35 percent of total calories**
**** 5 to 6 percent of total calories**

The chart (above) can help you tell how many fat grams are typically contained in eating plans at various calorie levels.

For More Information

For more information, talk with your health care provider. You can also find healthful recipe ideas at allinahealth.org/recipes.

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