

KEEPING AN EYE ON: Fats and Cholesterol

Your body produces some cholesterol on its own, but you can take control of your LDL (bad cholesterol) and HDL (good cholesterol) levels by choosing nutritious foods that keep your arteries clear. Too much LDL is harmful because it can build up in your arteries, causing plaque, which can lead to a heart attack or stroke. On the other hand, HDL is protective because it removes cholesterol from the bloodstream.

Contrary to popular belief, eating foods high in cholesterol doesn't have a huge impact on your LDL levels. That's because blood cholesterol is largely affected by the types of fat you eat. Low fat diets aren't the answer, either. Rather, the key is to eat a balanced diet with a healthy dose of unsaturated fats daily (those found in nuts, seeds, olive oil, and avocados). Choosing these healthy fats instead of animal fat or refined starches will keep your cholesterol levels in check, and keep your ticker in tip-top shape.

Nutrient	Effect on Health	Food Sources
Unsaturated fats 	Choosing unsaturated fats instead of refined carbohydrates (white bread, cake) or saturated fat (butter, sausage) can lower blood pressure, lower LDL (bad cholesterol), improve HDL (good cholesterol), and reduces risk of heart disease. There are two types of unsaturated fats, and both are beneficial to health.	Monounsaturated fats: avocados, nuts (almonds, pecans, hazelnuts), seeds (pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds), olive oil Polyunsaturated fats: Walnuts, flaxseeds, fish, sunflower oil
Cholesterol 	Cholesterol in food is only weakly linked to raising harmful LDL levels. While minimizing cholesterol is important for people that are at a very high risk of heart disease, choosing heart healthy unsaturated fats is more important.	animal products shellfish eggs organ meats
Saturated fats 	Choosing saturated fat instead of the healthier unsaturated fats described above will increase harmful LDL and increase risk of heart disease. While research also shows saturated fat can increase HDL ("good" cholesterol), at best its health impact is neutral, so enjoy it in moderation – a small serving of traditional cheese, a thin skim of butter on whole grain bread, or a few bacon crumbles in a bean soup.	butter cream bacon sausage cheese steak and other animal fats
Trans fats 	Trans fats are especially dangerous because they raise LDL, lower HDL, and are also linked to increased inflammation and insulin resistance.	partially hydrogenated oils margarine shortening some baked goods fried foods