

# Ask the expert: Making the right diet choices for people with high cholesterol



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Dear Liz,

*Q. I've just been told that I have high cholesterol. I'd like to lower my levels but I'm not sure what diet choices to make?*

*Signed,  
Diet Conscious*

A. It's not uncommon to be unsure about food and cholesterol. There is a great deal of information available about low fat foods – but some of the information may be confusing. About 20 per cent of the cholesterol in your blood comes from your diet. The more dietary fat you eat, more cholesterol will be produced in your blood. The first priority to lower your cholesterol with your diet is to avoid foods that contain fat.

## MAKING WISE CHOICES

When it comes to fat in your diet, it is important to make the right choices. Foods that contain saturated fat or trans-fatty acids can raise blood cholesterol and should be avoided.

- *Saturated fats* are found in fatty cuts of meat, chicken skin, and high fat dairy products, such as cream, butter, and cheese. They are also found in tropical oils such as coconut and palm oils.
- *Trans-fatty acids* are found in hard margarine and shortening, baked goods, packaged snacks, and deep-fried foods.

When you eat fat in your diet, make sure it is the right type; monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fats are better choices.

- *Monounsaturated fats* are found in canola, peanut and olive oils as well as avacados.
- *Polyunsaturated fats* are found mainly in vegetable oils, such as corn, sesame and sunflower oils. Some fish and shellfish also have polyunsaturated fats.

When you are eating and preparing meals, choose unsaturated fats over saturated fats, to help lower your blood cholesterol. Remember; however, that fat is fat! Even too much of the good fat can impact your cholesterol levels.

## DIETARY CHOLESTEROL

Some foods contain dietary cholesterol (organ meats, shellfish, egg yolks). Foods containing dietary cholesterol can also increase your blood cholesterol levels; therefore, you should limit your intake of these types of foods.

## THE BENEFITS OF FIBRE

There are several other food choices that may help people maintain a healthy heart. Eating soluble fibre will also help to lower your cholesterol levels. It can be found in oat bran, dried beans, peas and lentils, and pectin-rich fruits (apples, strawberries and citrus fruits). It is easy to incorporate soluble fibre

into your diet by adding fresh fruit to your morning cereal, or using whole wheat bread for your lunchtime sandwich.

Modifying your diet is a great start to lowering your cholesterol and improving your overall health. But, if you have made changes to your diet, and your cholesterol levels are still high, don't be discouraged. For many people it may also be necessary to add cholesterol-lowering medication to reach your target levels.

*If you would like more information on cholesterol and heart healthy eating, visit [www.makingtheconnection.ca](http://www.makingtheconnection.ca) or call toll-free 1-877-4LOW-LDL (1-877-456-9535).*

## Diabetes and Diet

Many of us may know that people with diabetes need to watch their sugar intake, but what they may not know is their diet should also be "heart healthy." People with diabetes must maintain a heart healthy diet to manage conditions such as high cholesterol, as they are two to four times more likely to develop heart disease.

A heart healthy diet includes eating fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes and foods that contain fibre. Choosing lean cuts of meat can also be part of a heart healthy diet.

Scheduling an appointment with a dietician is a great step to establishing a well-balanced diet. They will help people with diabetes make food choices to manage blood sugars and reduce cholesterol.

*For more information on diabetes, cholesterol, and cardiovascular disease, visit [www.makingtheconnection.ca](http://www.makingtheconnection.ca) or [www.diabetes.ca](http://www.diabetes.ca).*