

# Improve Your Cholesterol and Triglycerides

This handout has information on healthy eating and lifestyle choices that may help improve your blood cholesterol, triglycerides, and heart health.

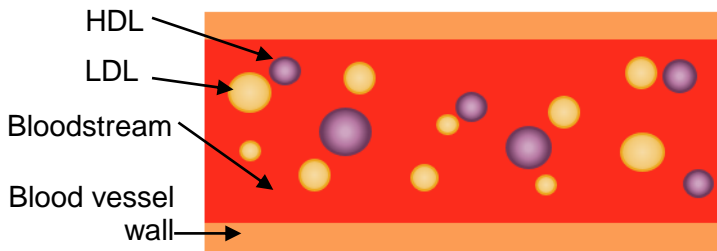
When you're ready, you can choose the healthy eating and lifestyle choices important to you.

## Blood cholesterol and triglycerides

There are two main types of cholesterol in your blood:

- **High Density Lipoprotein: HDL**

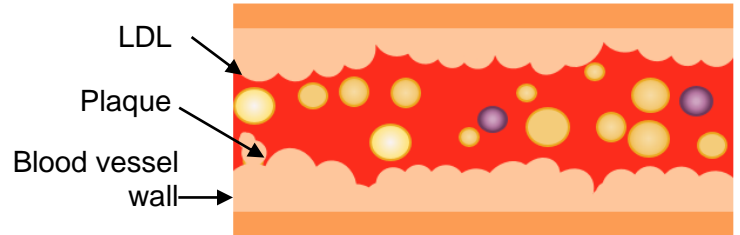
HDL is known as good or **healthy** cholesterol. It helps protect you by preventing narrowing of your blood vessels. Higher levels of HDL lower your risk for heart attacks and stroke.



- **Low Density Lipoprotein: LDL**

LDL is known as bad or **lousy** cholesterol. It increases the amount of fat in the walls of your blood vessels (plaque).

Higher levels of LDL in the bloodstream may cause plaque build-up in the blood vessel wall. This can narrow or block your blood vessels. Narrow vessels can increase blood pressure and may lead to heart attacks or strokes.



### Triglycerides

Triglycerides are a type of fat in your blood. Higher levels of triglycerides increase your risk for heart attack and stroke.

Triglycerides rise when you eat higher amounts of sugar, fat, and/or alcohol. They may also rise if your blood sugars are high.

## Do you eat foods that may improve your heart health?

Answer the questions below to help you decide if you're eating foods that may improve your heart health. Every *Yes* answer means you are eating heart healthy foods. If you answer *No* to any of these questions, and you're ready to make a change, you can use the information in this handout to set a goal that is important to you.

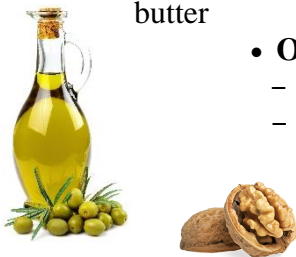
- |   |                              |                             |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Do you choose foods higher in unsaturated fats like olive oil, nuts, seeds, or avocados? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 2. Do you limit foods higher in saturated fat like processed meat, coconut oil, or butter?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 3. Do you eat fatty fish like salmon, trout, or sardines at least 2 times a week?           | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 4. Do you eat high fibre foods like whole grains, beans, or vegetables each day?            | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 5. Do you eat foods with soluble fibre like oats, psyllium, or barley each day?             | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 6. Do you eat foods made from soy like tofu, miso, tempeh, or edamame?                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 7. Do you choose a supplement or foods with added plant sterols daily?                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 8. Do you choose foods with little or no added sugar?                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

## Heart healthy eating: fats

### Unsaturated fats: choose more often

Unsaturated fats can help to lower LDL and triglycerides, and raise HDL. Choose the oils and foods below, as well as soft margarine made with these oils.

- **Oils:**
  - avocado
  - canola
  - flaxseed
  - olive
  - peanut
  - safflower
  - soybean
  - sunflower
  - walnut
- **Nuts:**
  - almond
  - hazelnut
  - peanut
  - pecan
  - pistachio
  - walnut
- **Seeds:**
  - chia
  - ground flax
  - hemp heart
  - pumpkin
  - sesame
  - seed butter
- **Other sources:**
  - avocados
  - olives



### Omega-3 fats: choose more often

Omega-3 fats protect blood vessels and can lower triglycerides. The best sources are fatty fish:

- Arctic char
- herring
- mackerel
- salmon
- sardines
- trout

Aim for two or more servings of fatty fish each week. One serving is 3½ ounces (100 grams) of cooked fish.

Here are some tips to help you eat more fish:

- Start with fish you enjoy.
- Order fish when eating out.
- Have fish baked, broiled, or grilled with little or no added salt or butter.
- Boost flavour with toppings like crushed peanuts, fresh herbs, lemons, and capers.

Plant foods with omega-3 include canola oil, walnuts, ground flax, and chia seeds. They are heart healthy, but will not lower your heart disease risk as much as fatty fish.

### Saturated fat: choose less often

Too much saturated fat may raise your LDL. Limit foods high in saturated fat like the ones below:

- processed, deli, and luncheon meats like bacon, bologna, hot dogs, or sausage
- meats with fat streaks (marbling), poultry skin
- ice cream, cream
- cheese
- butter, lard, and hard margarine
- tropical oils like palm or coconut

Read the Nutrition Facts table on packaged foods to choose foods with less saturated fat.

### Trans fats: avoid

Trans fats raise LDL and lower HDL. These fats used to be found in processed foods. Canada no longer allows trans fats to be added to food. However, in some foods, trans fats may be replaced with saturated fat like palm oil.

### Nitrates: limit or avoid

Nitrates are added to cured, smoked, and processed meats like deli meats, luncheon meats, and sausages to extend their shelf life. Nitrates increase your risk for heart disease and colon cancer.

Natural nitrates may be added to processed foods and can have the same negative effects on your health as nitrates. These nitrates include celery extract (powder, juice, or salt).

To reduce your intake of nitrates, avoid or limit:

- foods with sodium nitrates or celery extract in the ingredient list
- packaged food with the words ‘cured’ or ‘smoked’
- processed and deli meat like sausage, ham, or bacon

## Heart healthy eating: fibre

For a healthy heart, eat foods higher in fibre. Tips to include more high fibre foods:

- Choose whole grains like oats and barley, and breads and cereals made with whole grains. Look for *whole grain* in the ingredient list.
- Add beans, peas, or lentils to soups, salads, and other dishes.
- Include vegetables and fruits at meals and snacks.

### Soluble fibre: choose more often

Eating foods high in soluble fibre can help lower LDL. Foods high in soluble fibre include:

- apples
- apricots, dried
- artichoke
- avocado
- barley
- beans, lentils
- Brussels sprouts
- carrots
- chia seed
- eggplant
- figs
- ground flax
- jicama
- mango
- oats
- okra
- oranges
- pear
- prunes
- psyllium (husk, powder, in cereals or fibre supplements)
- squash
- sweet potatoes

## Heart healthy eating: soy protein

Foods made from soy can lower LDL. Try to include soy foods often:

- fortified soy beverage
- soy nuts
- tofu
- soybeans (edamame)
- tempeh
- miso
- natto



## Heart healthy eating: plant sterols

Plant sterols lower LDL and triglycerides. Small amounts of plant sterols are found in foods like nuts, seeds, oils, fruits, and beans. Our everyday foods do not provide enough plant sterols to lower LDL.

Plant sterols are added to some soft margarines and juices. Look for *plant sterols* on the label. Ask your healthcare team if you want to know about plant sterol supplements.

## Tips to lower triglycerides

If your triglycerides are high, the healthy eating and lifestyle tips below can help you manage them.

### Sugar and refined grains: choose less often

#### Limit sugar and sweet foods like these:

- candies
- chocolates
- fruit-flavored drinks
- hot and cold teas and coffee with added sugar
- jams, jellies
- pop, juice
- sugar, honey, molasses
- sweet baked foods
- sweet desserts
- syrups

#### Limit refined grain foods like these:

- white rice, pasta
- white bread
- white flour
- lower fibre breakfast cereal

Read the Nutrition Facts table on packaged foods to find foods with less sugar and more fibre.

### Omega-3 supplements and fatty fish

Some people may be asked by their healthcare team to take a fish oil supplement to help lower their triglycerides. Talk with your healthcare team about how much is right for you.

Fatty fish contain omega-3 fats. Try to eat 2 servings per week. One serving is 3½ ounces (100 g) of cooked fish. See the list of fatty fish on page 1.



### Alcohol: limit or avoid

Alcohol can increase your triglycerides.

When you have high triglycerides, limit alcohol to no more than 1–2 drinks per day. Include non-drinking days every week.

Your healthcare team may ask you to avoid drinking alcohol if your triglycerides are very high.

## Weight and health

Carrying extra body weight may affect your blood cholesterol and triglycerides. If you're ready to make changes with your weight, speak to your healthcare team.

## Stop smoking

Smoking increases the risk of plaque forming in your arteries. This raises your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Quitting smoking can help increase your HDL. One year after quitting, your risk of heart attacks is cut in half. Fifteen years after quitting, your risk of dying from a heart attack is as low as someone who never smoked at all.

If you would like help quitting, visit [www.albertaquits.ca](http://www.albertaquits.ca).

## Be physically active

Activity helps improve your heart health and lower your risk for heart disease and other health conditions.

- On most days of the week, aim for 30–60 minutes of activity that makes your heart beat faster (aerobic). These activities include fast walking, swimming, bike riding, and playing sports.
- Aim for 3 weight training sessions each week.

For more information, see [Canada's Physical Activity Guidelines for all ages](#).

## Goal setting

This handout includes several lifestyle choices that can help improve your blood cholesterol and triglycerides. Changing your lifestyle can be hard, especially if you try to make too many changes at once.

When you're ready to make a change, it can help to set a goal, and to break your goal into smaller steps. You're more likely to reach smaller goals.

## More support

Talk to your healthcare team if you would like more support with:

- heart healthy choices in this handout
- setting goals

Health Link has dietitians available to answer nutrition questions. If you have a nutrition question, call 8-1-1 and ask to talk to a dietitian.

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