

CHOLESTEROL LOWERING TIPS

Stock up on vitamin E. Scientists have discovered that we have both good (high-density lipoprotein, or HDL) and bad (low density lipoprotein, or LDL) cholesterol running through our blood stream. Consuming 400 international units of vitamin E each day may help keep the bad cholesterol from oxidizing-an internal "rusting" process that causes the cholesterol to harden into arterial plaque, which in turn causes heart disease. Vitamin E also raises the level of good cholesterol. "Taking vitamin E supplements helps prevent the cholesterol in your body from plaguing, so it does less damage," says Karen E. Burke, M.D., Ph.D., a dermatologist and dermatologic surgeon in New York City who has studied various effects of vitamin E. Vitamin E is found in vegetable oils, nuts, and grains, but it would be very difficult to obtain 400 international units daily from diet alone. Be sure to check with your doctor, though before beginning a supplement program.

Eat breakfast every morning. Breakfast skippers tend to have higher cholesterol levels than those who start off their mornings with a bellyful, according to studies. One reason may be that breakfast skippers make up for missing the morning feast by munching on unhealthy snacks later on, suggests John L. Stanton, Ph.D., professor of food marketing at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia. Research also shows that those who eat ready-to-eat cereal for breakfast have lower cholesterol levels than those choosing other morning entrees.

Nibble throughout the day. One way to lower your cholesterol is simply to change how often you eat. Research has shown that large meals trigger the release of large amounts of insulin, according to David Jenkins, M.D., Ph.D., director of the Clinical Nutrition and Risk Factor Modification Center at St. Michael's Hospital at the University of Toronto. Insulin release in turn stimulates the production of an enzyme that increases cholesterol production by the liver. Having smaller, more frequent meals (but not increasing over all calories) may limit insulin release and play a role in cholesterol control and heart disease prevention, speculates Dr. Jenkins. Add vitamin C to your menu. Other vitamins and minerals also have a beneficial effect on cholesterol. Research by Paul Jacques, Sc.D., an epidemiologist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University in Boston, shows that people with diets high in vitamin C tend to have higher HDL levels. Vitamin C is especially beneficial when you get it from fruits and vegetables that also have a cholesterol-lowering fiber called pectin. Pectin surrounds cholesterol and helps transport it out of your digestive system before it gets into your blood. Vitamin C-rich, pectin-rich foods include citrus fruits, tomatoes, potatoes, strawberries, apples, and spinach.

Go heavy on garlic. Vampires aren't the only thing garlic keeps away. In large doses—at least seven cloves a day—this food can significantly reduce cholesterol. Of course, that's probably more garlic than most people eat in a month. To get a similar benefit, try odorless garlic pills. When people with moderately high cholesterol took four capsules a day of an odorless liquid garlic extract called Kyolic, their cholesterol levels initially rose but then fell an average of 44 points after six months, according to a research study headed by Benjamin Lau, M.D., Ph.D., at Loma Linda University School of Medicine in Loma Linda, California. You can find garlic pills at most health food stores.

Don't depend on decaf. Decaffeinated coffee actually raises LDL levels more than regular brew, so it's the worst beverage selection if you have high cholesterol, according to Dr. Jenkins. It may be because the beans used for decaf are stronger than "regular" beans. Frequent coffee drinkers (those who drink it daily typically have a 7 percent cholesterol increase, as shown in a study at Stanford University in Stanford, California.

Gravitate toward grapes. There's a cholesterol-lowering compound in virtually all products containing grape skin, including wine, according to pomologist Leroy Creasy, Ph.D., of Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Science in Ithaca, New York. You can take advantage of these cholesterol-clobbering qualities by drinking grape juice or simply eating grapes.

Cook up some Beans. Lima beans, kidney beans, navy beans, soybeans, and other legumes can all help lower your cholesterol, according to James W. Anderson, M.D., an expert in cholesterol research who is professor of medicine and clinical nutrition at the University of Kentucky College of Medicine in Lexington. The reason these high-fiber legumes are so effective is because, they, too, contain pectin. The more of these beans you can eat, the greater the benefits.

In one study, Dr. Anderson asked men to eat 1 1/2 cups of cooked beans a day. The result? Their cholesterol plummeted 20 percent in just three weeks. You probably won't go for much, but the more beans, the better and high-fiber diets have many other benefits besides. Look for a cookbook or two that have great recipes with beans, and try to get more in your diet.

Munch a couple of carrots. Bug's Bunny's favorite entrée is a boon to arteries because carrots have plenty of cholesterol-lowering pectin. "It may be possible for people with high cholesterol to lower it 10 to 20 percent just by eating two carrots a day," says Peter D. Hoagland, Ph.D., a researcher at the U.S. Department of Agriculture Eastern Regional Research Center of Philadelphia.

Start leading a healthier life today!