

## Cholesterol-Lowering Foods: The Fabulous Five

You've been told to lower your cholesterol, a form of fat made by the liver and present in some foods. What's your first thought? If you're like many people, you may think first about what you need to *stop* eating. But did you know that *adding* certain foods to your diet may do as much to improve your cholesterol as medication? These foods are so effective that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) says they can carry the health claim for managing cholesterol.

Here are the fabulous five foods.

**1. Soluble fiber.** Sometimes called roughage, soluble fiber reduces low-density lipoprotein (LDL) – the "bad" cholesterol. Soluble fiber is the portion of plant products that pushes food through the digestive system. It seems to lower cholesterol levels by reducing its absorption in the intestines. Aim for 10 grams or more a day. Examples of soluble fiber include:

- Oatmeal
- Fruit
- Kidney beans
- Psyllium
- Barley

**2. Nuts.** Rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids, many kinds of nuts reduce cholesterol and help keep blood vessels healthy and elastic. Aim for a handful each day or about 1.5 ounces. Remember that nuts are high in calories, so more isn't better. Being overweight increases your risk of heart disease. To keep fats to a minimum, make substitutions. For example, add nuts to salads instead of cheese or meat. Examples of nuts to include in your diet are:

- Walnuts
- Almonds
- Peanuts
- Pecans
- Pine nuts
- Pistachios
- Hazelnuts

**3. Fish.** Fatty fish is high in omega-3 fatty acids, which helps lower cholesterol and reduce blood pressure and the risk of blood clots. Aim for two servings of fish each week. You can also take an omega-3 or fish oil supplement or eat ground flaxseed or canola oil. Examples of fish high in omega-3 fatty acids are:

- Mackerel
- Lake trout
- Salmon
- Albacore tuna
- Sardines
- Herring

**4. Olive oil.** Many people think all oil is bad. But it's not quite that simple. Olive oil packs a powerful punch that lowers "bad" cholesterol, but doesn't touch the "good" kind, high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol. Extra-virgin olive oil may have the best

effects. Aim for 2 tablespoons of olive oil each day. You can use olive oil to sauté foods, baste meat, or as a salad dressing when mixed with vinegar.

**5. Fortified foods.** Some foods are now fortified with plant sterols or stanols. These are substances that block the absorption of cholesterol. Aim for 2 grams a day of plant sterols. That's equal to two 8-ounce servings of juice or about 15 grams of enriched spreads a day. Examples of the kinds of foods fortified with these substances are:

- Margarine
- Low-fat spreads
- Orange juice
- Yogurt drinks

Of course, it's important to add all this advice to the old standard: Eat less of saturated fats, including meats and some oils, and try to eliminate trans fats. Trans fats still show up in some baked goods like cakes, cookies, and crackers. They raise LDL and lower HDL. And remember: Exercise and weight control are two other pieces of the cholesterol-control puzzle. If you want to learn more or to find out if you are at risk, talk with me or go to [www.healthmart.com](http://www.healthmart.com) .