

Cholesterol-Lowering Foods

Tasty, functional foods help you lower cholesterol naturally.

By [R. Morgan Griffin](#)

Reviewed by [Brunilda Nazario, MD](#)

WebMD Feature

Do you want a diet to lower cholesterol? We all know that butter, ice cream, and fatty meats raise cholesterol, but do you know which foods make up a low-cholesterol diet? Find out here.

Here's some good news. To lower your cholesterol, you can actually eat more of certain foods. A handful of some "functional foods" have been shown to make a big impact on your cholesterol levels. They're also much tastier than a pill chased with a glass of water.

"These foods may not be magic, but they're close to it," says Ruth Frechman, RD, a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association.

Researchers have found that some foods -- such as fatty fish, walnuts, oatmeal, and oat bran, and foods fortified with plant sterols or stanols -- can help control your cholesterol. Some studies have shown that a diet combining these "superfoods" may work as well as some cholesterol-lowering medicines to reduce your "bad" LDL cholesterol levels.

How strong is the evidence? The FDA has reviewed the research on each of these foods, and given them the status of a "health claim" for managing cholesterol.

This is great news for the 105 million adults in the U.S. with high cholesterol. Making good food choices is an easy way of improving your health. It also puts less strain on your pocketbook. A trip to the grocery store is bound to be cheaper than a trip to the pharmacy. Also, many people can't handle the side effects from cholesterol drugs. Focusing on diet gives us all a new option.



Getting Started on a Low-Cholesterol Diet

Managing high cholesterol isn't a simple do-it-yourself project. You need to work with your health care provider. And while changing your diet may help a lot, many people still need drugs to reduce their risk of heart disease.

Also, remember that these foods aren't cure-alls. A handful of walnuts or a bowl of oatmeal won't make you invincible. It won't give you a free pass to eat all the high-fat foods you want. To benefit, you still must eat low-fat foods, watch your weight, and get more exercise.

"Eating a healthy diet is not just about eating a few special foods," says Suzanne Farrell, MS, RD, a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association. "There's a bigger picture. You need to practice moderation, eat a variety of foods, and get enough physical activity."

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SOURCES: Suzanne Farrell, MS, RD, spokeswoman, American Dietetic Association. Ruth Frechman, RD, Los Angeles; spokeswoman, American Dietetic Association. Keecha Harris, DrPH, RD, spokeswoman, American Dietetic Association. U.S. Food and Drug Administration web site. American Dietetic Association web site. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute web site. American Heart Association web site. Jenkins, D. American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, February 2005; vol 81: pp 380-87. Jenkins, D. Journal of the American Medical Association, July 23-30, 2003; vol 290: pp 502-510.

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