



Cholesterol

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a fat found naturally in your body and you need it so your cells work normally. Most of the cholesterol in your body is made by your liver.

Cholesterol is found in foods such as shellfish, eggs, liver and kidneys. The cholesterol from foods in your diet does not have a large effect on cholesterol levels in your blood so you don't need to completely cut them out. You do, however, need to follow a healthy and balanced diet that is low in saturated fat.

Too much saturated fat in your diet can raise the level of cholesterol in your blood.

Foods that are high in saturated fat include lard, butter, cream and the fat on meat. Fried food, biscuits, cakes and pastries can also be high in saturated fat, depending on the type of fat used to make them.

Full fat cheeses, full fat milk and other dairy products are a good source of calcium. However, these foods are also high in saturated fat so it is advisable to choose lower fat versions.

What happens if you have high cholesterol?

High cholesterol can increase your risk of heart disease and stroke. There are several factors which increase the risk of heart disease, including:

- a diet high in saturated fat
- being overweight or obese
- high blood pressure.

Also, your cholesterol levels generally increase as you get older and men are more likely to be affected than women.

The amount of cholesterol in your blood is largely decided by your genes. Some health conditions and medications can also affect your cholesterol level, and making changes to your diet and lifestyle can help. If changes to your diet do not reduce your cholesterol levels your GP may suggest you take medication.

Cholesterol levels are often linked to body weight. After diagnosis of coeliac disease and starting the gluten-free diet, some people put on weight. This is because your gut starts to heal and you are able to absorb nutrients from food much better than before. This can contribute to a raised cholesterol level.



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Tips for reducing blood cholesterol

- Choose lower fat dairy products.
- Cut all fat off meat and where possible choose lean cuts (or drain minced beef).
- Cut down on fatty and sugary foods like cakes, biscuits, pies, pastries, butter and ghee.
- Swap saturated fats for monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fats but use sparingly.
 - Foods high in monounsaturated fats include olive oil, rapeseed oil and avocados
 - Foods high in polyunsaturated fats include sunflower, sesame and corn oils.
- Remember that all fats (saturated, monounsaturated, polyunsaturated) are high in calories. If you're watching your weight, cut down the amount of fat in your diet.
- Increase the amount of soluble fibre you eat. This is found in fruit, vegetables and pulses (peas, beans and lentils).
- To improve iron absorption, include food and drink rich in vitamin C with meals. Good sources include fruit juice, citrus fruits and potatoes.
- Aim to eat one portion of oily fish per week, such as herring, mackerel, trout, kippers, salmon or fresh tuna.
- Plant sterols may help lower cholesterol levels. Sterols are naturally present in small amounts in many fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and vegetable oils. There are also manufactured products containing higher amounts of plant sterols, such as Benecol® and Flora® pro.activ. You need to use these products on a regular basis for them to have an effect.
- It is also important to try and keep your weight at a healthy level. Keeping active will help with this.

For more information, talk to a dietitian who can offer you support in following a healthy gluten-free diet.

This information is for guidance only and should not replace advice given by your healthcare professional.

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