women's health clinic

ALL ABOUT CHOLESTEROL

What is cholesterol?

It is a type of fat made in the liver. It also comes from many different foods and is part of a healthy diet.

Cholesterol is an important nutrient. It aids in healthy body function.

Why is cholesterol level important?

Raised cholesterol levels may cause arteries to harden and blood vessels to clog.

While this may be true, there are many other factors (other than cholesterol) that can affect cardiovascular health. A focus on overall health and nourishment is much more important than putting emphasis on one specific number.

What causes high cholesterol?

Cholesterol levels are very complex. Research shows that high cholesterol levels are largely due to genetics, with a small impact by nutrition.

This means we may be able to alter our cholesterol through behaviour changes, but we cannot completely control what our cholesterol level will be.

Tips to improve cholesterol levels and heart health

Increase fibre intake throughout the day
- » Eat whole grains, veggies and fruits, beans and lentils, and nuts and seeds.

Include more omega-3 rich foods
- » Walnuts, salmon, canola oil, sardines and soybeans are all great sources of omega-3.

Keep moving
- » Movement is great for blood circulation and keeping your heart healthy.
- » Movement also helps us manage stress

Stress less
- » Stress levels can also contribute to cardiovascular complications.
- » People who manage their stress well have lower rates of heart disease

Remember: Heart health has many factors. Focus on wellness as a whole, rather than just one factor like cholesterol. Stress, worry and self-blame can contribute to illness more than cholesterol itself.

Increase fibre intake

Cook with more lentils and beans. They are a very high fibre source, and surprisingly easy to add into meals.

» Add lentils to pasta sauce.
» Red lentils are great in a tomato sauce.
» Put black beans in wraps and tacos.
» Add lentils/beans to salad.
» Canned are just as nutritious as dried!

Eat whole grain foods more often. Try to choose whole wheat or whole grain products. They contain more fibre.

» Bread, pasta, and rice all come in whole grain form.
» If you prefer the white form of these grains, try cooking half and half, or adding other fibre sources with the meal.
» Any amount of whole grains will make a difference!

Include more flax and/or bran in your meals. They are very high sources of fibre and can be easy add-ins to snacks/meals.

» Add to your favorite cereal.
» Add to your favorite yogurt.
» Sprinkle on toast with peanut butter or jam.
» Add to smoothies along with your favorite fruits
» Add to any baking. It's easy to add to muffins!

Nuts and seeds are another great high fibre snack. Have them on their own, as nut or seed butters, in salads or baking.

All fruits and vegetables have fibre. Some ways to include more:

» Add fruit to your favorite cereal or add veggies like mushrooms and spinach to scrambled eggs.
» Vegetables are great to add to any sauce. Add some bell peppers to spaghetti or chili for more nutrition.
» Canned or frozen fruit and vegetables have just as much fibre as fresh.

Include more omega-3 rich foods

» Walnuts are great snack throughout the day
» Add walnuts to salads or baking.
» Have fatty fish like salmon or tuna weekly.
» Try to cook with canola oil.
» Try adding tofu to a dish. Tofu is made from soybeans and can replace the meat (or include both meat and tofu) in a dish.

Keep moving

» Walk, hike, swim, garden, dance or even do housework.
» Even 10 minutes a day can improve cholesterol levels.
» Find something you enjoy that works for your body. We are unlikely to do things we don't enjoy.

Stress less

» Practice deep breathing.
» Exercise regularly. Every little bit of movement helps!
» Enjoy some time each week doing something you love.

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