

## Which Foods to Choose?

### Oats, bran, nuts, fish, butter, eggs, soy?

Can a handful of nuts, a bowl of oatmeal, or a soy shake help with your health? If cutting out bad fats isn't enough to reduce your cholesterol, you may want to try adding soluble fiber, nuts, and fish to your diet.<sup>1</sup> If you need more boost from your foods, adding foods fortified with plant sterols<sup>1</sup> can be an option for those with high cholesterol or at high risk for heart disease. (**Note:** Talk with your doctor about this option, and only add food sources with plant sterols to your diet when recommended by your doctor.) With a few tweaks to your diet, knowing which foods to choose can help stave off cholesterol problems<sup>1</sup> and heart disease. Here is some of the latest information from the Mayo Clinic on the health benefits of some foods you might choose.

#### Oatmeal and oat bran



"Oatmeal contains soluble fiber, which reduces your low-density lipoprotein (LDL) – the "bad" cholesterol. Soluble fiber is also found in such foods as kidney beans, Brussel sprouts, apples, pears, psyllium, barley, and prunes."<sup>1</sup> (See [Food](#)

[Sources of Soluble Fiber](#) for more foods with fiber.)

"Soluble fiber appears to reduce the absorption of cholesterol in your intestines. Gel-like soluble fiber binds bile (which contains cholesterol) and dietary cholesterol so that the body excretes it.

Five to 10 grams of soluble fiber a day decreases LDL cholesterol by about 5 percent. Eating 1.5 cups of cooked oatmeal provides 4.5 grams of fiber — enough to lower your cholesterol. To mix it up a little, try oat bran or cold cereal made with oatmeal or oat bran."<sup>1</sup>

#### Walnuts, almonds, and more

"Studies have shown that walnuts can significantly reduce blood cholesterol. Rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids, walnuts also help keep blood vessels healthy and elastic. Almonds appear to have a similar effect, resulting in a marked improvement within just four weeks.



A cholesterol-lowering diet in which 20 percent of the calories come from walnuts may reduce LDL cholesterol by 12 percent. For a 1,200-calorie per day diet, a little less than 1/3 of a cup of walnuts is about 240 calories, or 20 percent of the total calories for the day."<sup>1</sup>

#### Why Might Nuts & Omega-3s Help?

This excerpt from the Mayo Clinic explains why nuts and omega-3 fatty acids might benefit our health....

"It's not entirely clear, but it's thought that the unsaturated fats in nuts — both monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats — lower bad cholesterol levels. Many nuts are also rich in omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3s are a healthy form of fatty acids that seem to help your heart by, among other things, preventing dangerous heart rhythms that can lead to heart attacks. Omega-3 fatty acids are also found in fish, but nuts are one of the best plant-based sources of omega-3 fatty acids. Nuts also have lots of arginine, which is a molecule that increases the production of nitric oxide in your body, which may in turn help improve the health of your artery walls and make them more flexible and less prone to blood clots. Other substances in nuts that could improve your heart health include Vitamin E and fiber."

“Almost every type of nut has a lot of nutrition packed into a tiny package.... Eating nuts instead of a less healthy snack can help you more easily follow a heart-healthy diet.” Though walnuts are the best studied nuts, “almonds, macadamia nuts, hazelnuts, and pecans are other nuts that appear to be quite heart healthy. Even peanuts, which are technically not a nut but a legume, seem to be relatively healthy. Keep in mind, you could end up canceling out the heart-healthy benefits of nuts if they’re covered with chocolate, sugar, or salt.”<sup>2</sup>

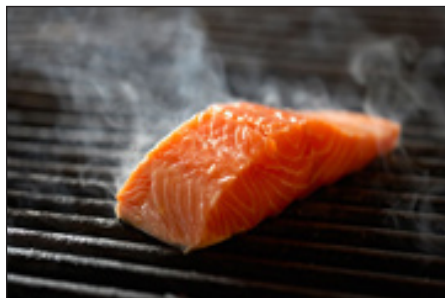
All nuts are high in calories (as much as 80 percent of a nut is fat), however; so a handful will suffice.<sup>1,2</sup> “As with any food, good or bad, eating too much can cause weight gain, and being overweight places you at higher risk of heart disease. To avoid gaining weight, replace foods high in saturated fat with nuts. For example, instead of using cheese, luncheon meat, or croutons in your salad, add a handful of walnuts or almonds.”<sup>1</sup>

### Fish and omega-3 fatty acids

“Studies in the 1970s showed that Greenland Eskimos had a lower rate of heart disease than did other individuals living in Greenland at the same time. Analysis of dietary differences between the groups showed that the Eskimos ate less saturated fat and more omega-3 fatty acids found in fish and whale and seal meat.

Research since that time has supported the heart-healthy benefits of eating fish. If you can’t dine with the Eskimos, other good sources of omega-3 fatty acids include flaxseed, walnuts, canola oil, and soybean oil.

Omega-3 fatty acids are noted for their triglyceride-lowering effect, but they also help the heart in other ways such as reducing blood pressure and the risk of blood clots.



In people who have already had heart attacks, fish oil—or omega-3 fatty acids—significantly reduces the risk of sudden death.

Doctors recommend eating at least two servings of fish a week. The highest levels of omega-3 fatty acids are in mackerel, lake trout, herring, sardines, albacore tuna, and salmon. However, to maintain the heart-healthy benefits of fish, bake or grill it.”<sup>1</sup>

### Butter or margarine?

“Margarine usually tops butter when it comes to heart health. Margarine is made from vegetable oils, so it contains no cholesterol. Margarine is also higher in “good” fats—polyunsaturated and monounsaturated—than butter is. These types of fat help reduce low-density lipoprotein (LDL), or “bad,” cholesterol, when substituted for saturated fat. Butter, on the other hand, is made from animal fat, so it contains cholesterol and high levels of saturated fat.



But not all margarines are created equal, and some may even be worse than butter. Most margarines are processed using a method called hydrogenation, which adds unhealthy trans fats. In general, the more solid the margarine, the more trans fats it contains—so stick margarines usually have more trans fats than do tub margarines. Like saturated fats, trans fats increase blood cholesterol and the risk of heart disease. In addition, trans fats can lower high-density lipoprotein (HDL), or ‘good,’ cholesterol levels.

When choosing a margarine, try to find one with the lowest trans fat content possible and less than 3 grams total of saturated plus trans fats.”<sup>3</sup>

### Foods fortified with plant sterols or stanols

“Foods are now available that have been fortified with sterols or stanols—substances found in plants that help block the absorption of cholesterol.

Margarines and orange juice fortified with plant sterols can help reduce LDL cholesterol by more than 10 percent. The amount of daily plant sterols needed for results is at least 2 grams, which equals about two 8-ounce servings of plant sterol-fortified orange juice a day.

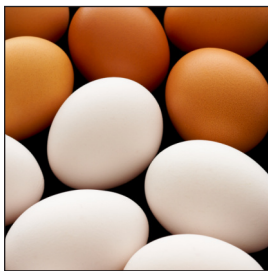
Plant sterols or stanols in fortified foods don’t appear to affect levels of triglycerides or of “good” high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol. Nor do they interfere with the absorption of the fat-soluble vitamins—vitamins A, D, E, and K.

However, the American Heart Association recommends foods fortified with plant sterols **only for people who actually have high levels of LDL cholesterol** [emphasis added].”<sup>1</sup>

## Eggs

“Eggs are high in cholesterol, and a diet high in cholesterol can contribute to elevated blood cholesterol levels. But the extent to which dietary cholesterol raises blood cholesterol levels isn’t clear. Many scientists believe that saturated fats and trans fats have a greater impact than dietary cholesterol in raising blood cholesterol.

If you are healthy, it is recommended that you limit your dietary cholesterol intake to less than 300 milligrams (mg) a day. If you have cardiovascular disease, diabetes, or high LDL cholesterol, limit dietary cholesterol intake to less than 200 mg a day. The yolk of one large egg has about 213 mg of cholesterol. If you eat an egg on a given day, it may be a good idea to limit or avoid other sources of cholesterol for the rest of that day.



If you like eggs but don’t want the extra cholesterol, use egg whites. Egg whites contain no cholesterol. You may also use cholesterol-free egg substitutes, which are made with egg whites. If you want to reduce cholesterol in a recipe that

calls for eggs, you can use two egg whites or ¼ cup cholesterol-free egg substitute in place of one whole egg.”<sup>4</sup>

## Soy

Finally, a word about soy. “Long thought to have cholesterol-lowering effects, a recent meta-analysis by the American Heart Association’s Nutrition Committee showed soy protein actually has very little impact on reducing cholesterol levels. In

January 2006, the American Heart Association issued a statement saying the cardiovascular health benefits of soy protein are minimal at best. No benefit was seen on HDL, triglycerides, or blood pressure, and even with a large intake of soy, only a small impact on LDL was seen.



Though it may not lower your cholesterol, soy does contain vitamins and minerals and is a good source of fiber. It’s also a healthy low-fat alternative source of protein.”<sup>1</sup>

### Sources:

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