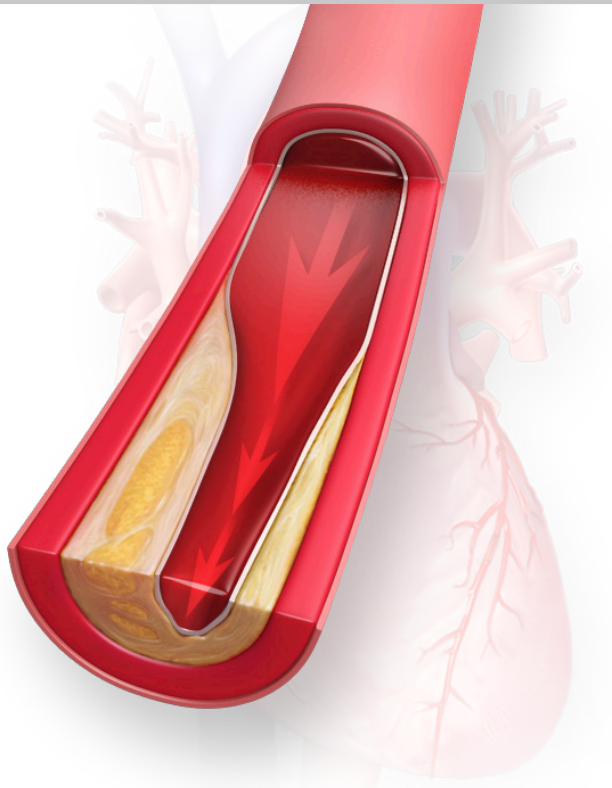
How Can I Improve My Cholesterol With Heart-Healthy Eating?

Most heart and blood vessel disease develops when cholesterol, plaque and other fatty deposits build up inside artery walls. Over time, these deposits can narrow the arteries that carry blood to your heart, which may reduce blood flow. If a blood clot forms and blocks the artery, a heart attack can occur. If a blood clot blocks an artery leading to or in the brain, it can cause a stroke.

The good news is you can make lifestyle changes to improve your cholesterol. You can eat more heart-healthy foods, work towards a healthier weight, be physically active, get healthy sleep, manage stress and avoid tobacco products. For some people, medication may also be needed.

Your healthcare professional can help you create a plan that works for you to improve your cholesterol.



Cholesterol can join with fats and other substances in your blood to build up in the inner walls of your arteries. The arteries can become clogged and narrow, and blood flow is reduced.

Which foods should I eat?

Choose foods that are naturally lower in saturated and trans fats, such as:

- A variety of vegetables and fruits
- Foods mostly made with whole grains, not refined grains, such as whole-grain bread, cereal, pasta and brown rice
- Fat-free and low-fat milk products or fortified plant-based milk alternatives, such as oat, soy or almond milk
- Skinless poultry and lean meats. If you choose to eat red meat and pork, select options labeled "loin" and "round." These cuts tend to be leaner.
- Fatty fish such as salmon, trout, albacore tuna and sardines
- Plant-based sources of protein, such as beans, peas, lentils, quinoa, tofu and nuts and seeds
- Nontropical vegetable oils such as canola, corn, olive or safflower oils

Which foods should I limit?

Enjoy these foods less often — or in smaller portions.

- Foods high in sodium (salt)
- Sweets and sugar-sweetened beverages
- Red meats and fatty meats that aren't trimmed
- Processed meats such as bologna, salami and sausage
- Full-fat dairy products such as whole-milk, cream, ice cream, butter and cheese
- Baked goods made with saturated and trans fats, such as donuts, cakes and cookies
- Foods that list the words "hydrogenated oils" in the ingredients panel
- Tropical oils, such as palm and coconut oil
- Solid fats such as butter, shortening, stick margarine and lard
- Fried foods

(continued)

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What are some cooking tips that can help?

A few simple cooking shifts can help lower saturated fat and calories without giving up flavor.

You could try:

- Adding more vegetables and fruits to your meals and snacks
- Using a rack to drain off fat when you broil, roast or bake poultry and meats
- Choosing leaner cuts of meat when you choose to eat meat
- Skipping basting with drippings; using wine, fruit juice or marinades instead
- Broiling or grilling instead of pan-frying
- Cutting off all visible fat from meat before cooking
- Removing the skin from poultry
- Using vegetable oil spray to brown or sauté foods
- Serving smaller portions of higher-calorie dishes
- Using low-fat, low-sodium cheese instead of full-fat options



HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

1. Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721) or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
2. Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-News for heart patients and their families at **HeartInsight.org**.
3. Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at **SupportNetwork.heart.org**.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down questions for the next time you see your healthcare professional.

For example:

What about eating out?

Why are weight control and physical activity important?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/AnswersByHeart** to learn more.

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