

Improve Your Cholesterol and Triglycerides

This handout provides eating and lifestyle options to improve your blood cholesterol, triglycerides, and heart health. When you're ready, you can choose the healthy eating and lifestyle choices important to you.

Blood cholesterol and triglycerides

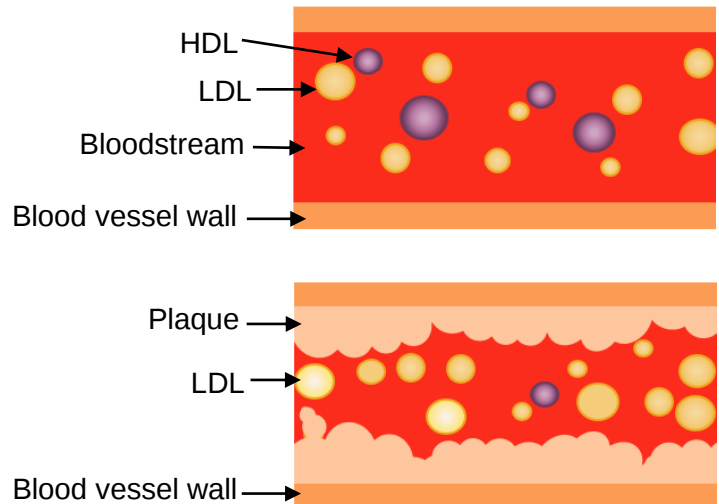
High Density Lipoprotein: HDL cholesterol

HDL is known as good or **healthy** cholesterol. It helps protect you by preventing narrowing of your blood vessels.

Low Density Lipoprotein: LDL cholesterol

LDL is known as bad or **lousy** cholesterol. Higher levels of LDL in the bloodstream increases the amount of fat in the walls of your blood vessels (plaque) over time.

This can narrow or block your blood vessels. Narrow vessels can increase blood pressure and may lead to heart attacks or strokes.



Triglycerides

Triglycerides are a type of fat in your blood. Higher levels of triglycerides increase your risk for heart attack and stroke.

Triglycerides rise when you eat higher amounts of sugar, fat, and/or alcohol. They may also rise if your blood sugars are high.

Do you eat foods that may improve your heart health?

Check Yes or No for each statement below. Every Yes answer means you are already eating heart healthy foods. If you are ready to make a change, you can use the information on the following pages to increase your Yes answers.

1. I choose foods higher in unsaturated fats like olive oil, nuts, seeds, or avocados. ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. I limit foods higher in saturated fat like processed meat, coconut oil, cream, or butter. ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. I eat fatty fish like salmon, trout, or sardines at least 2 times a week. ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. I eat higher fibre foods like whole grains, beans, or vegetables each day. ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. I eat foods with soluble fibre like oats, psyllium, or barley each day. ☐ Yes ☐ No
6. I eat soy foods like tofu, miso, tempeh, or edamame. ☐ Yes ☐ No
7. I choose foods with little or no added sugar. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Heart healthy eating

Unsaturated fats: choose more often

Unsaturated fats can help to lower LDL and triglycerides, and raise HDL. Choose from the items below, as well as soft margarine made with these oils.

Oils:

- avocado
- canola
- flaxseed
- olive
- peanut
- safflower
- soybean
- sunflower
- walnut

Nuts:

- almond
- hazelnut
- nut butter
- peanut
- pecan
- pistachio
- walnut

Seeds:

- chia
- ground flax
- hemp heart
- pumpkin
- seed butter
- sesame
- sunflower

Other sources:

- avocados
- olives



Omega-3 fats: choose more often

Omega-3 fats protect blood vessels and can lower triglycerides. The best sources are fatty fish:

- Arctic char
- mackerel
- sardines
- herring
- salmon
- trout

Aim for 2 or more servings of fatty fish each week. One serving is 3½ oz (100 g) of cooked fish.

Here are some tips to help you eat more fish:

- Start with fish you enjoy.
- Order fish when eating out.
- Have fish baked, broiled, or grilled with little or no added salt or butter.
- Boost flavour with toppings like crushed peanuts, fresh herbs, lemons, and capers.

Plant foods with omega-3 include canola oil, walnuts, ground flax, and chia seeds. They are heart healthy, but will not lower your heart disease risk as much as fatty fish.

Saturated fat: choose less often

Too much saturated fat may raise your LDL.

Read the Nutrition Facts table on packaged foods to choose foods with less saturated fat.

Limit foods high in saturated fat like the ones below:

- meats with fat streaks (marbling), poultry skin
- ice cream, cream
- butter, lard, and hard margarine
- tropical oils like palm or coconut
- processed, deli, and luncheon meats like bacon, bologna, hot dogs, or sausage

Nitrates are added to cured, smoked, and processed meats like deli meats, luncheon meats, and sausages to extend their shelf life. These meats increase your risk for heart disease and colon cancer.

To reduce your intake of nitrates, avoid or limit:

- packaged food with the words cured or smoked
- processed and deli meat like sausage, ham, or bacon

Fibre

Eat foods higher in fibre for a healthy heart.

Tips to include higher fibre foods:

- Choose whole grains like oats and barley, and breads and cereals made with whole grains. Look for the words “whole grain” in the ingredient list.
- Add beans, peas, or lentils to soups, salads, and other dishes.
- Include vegetables and fruits at meals and snacks.

Soluble fibre: choose more often

Eating foods high in soluble fibre can help lower LDL. Foods high in soluble fibre include:

- apples
- chia seed
- oranges
- apricots
- eggplant
- pear
- artichoke
- figs
- prunes
- avocado
- ground flax
- psyllium (husk, powder, in cereals or fibre supplements)
- barley
- jicama
- squash
- beans, lentils
- mango
- sweet potatoes
- Brussels sprouts
- okra
- carrots

Soy protein

Soy foods can lower LDL. Try to include soy foods often:

- fortified soy beverage
- soybeans (edamame)
- tofu
- soy nuts
- tempeh
- miso
- natto



Plant sterols

Plant sterols lower LDL and triglycerides. Small amounts of plant sterols are found in foods like nuts, seeds, oils, fruits, and beans. Our everyday foods do not provide enough plant sterols to lower LDL.

Ask your healthcare team if you want to know about plant sterol supplements or foods with added plant sterols.

Tips to lower triglycerides

If your triglycerides are high, the tips below can help you manage them.

Sugar and refined grains: choose less often

Limit sugar and sweet foods like these:

- candies
- chocolates
- desserts
- fruit-flavored drinks
- hot and cold teas and coffee with added sugar
- jams, jellies
- pop, juice
- sugar, honey, molasses
- sweet baked foods
- syrups

Limit refined grain foods like these:

- lower fibre breakfast cereal
- naan, roti, or tortilla made with white flour
- pasta made with white flour
- white bread
- white flour
- white rice

Read the Nutrition Facts table on packaged foods to find foods with less sugar and more fibre.

Omega-3 supplements and fatty fish

Some people may be asked by their healthcare team to take a fish oil supplement to help lower their triglycerides. Talk with your healthcare team about how much is right for you.

Fatty fish contain omega-3 fats. Try to eat 2 servings per week. One serving is 3½ oz (100 g) of cooked fish. See the list of fatty fish on page 2.



Alcohol: limit or avoid

Alcohol can increase your triglycerides.

Drinking less is better for your health. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have questions about alcohol and your health. For more information, visit ccsa.ca.

Weight and health

Carrying extra body weight may affect your blood cholesterol and triglycerides.

If you are interested in learning more about your weight and risk of heart disease, talk to your healthcare provider.

Stop smoking

Smoking increases the risk of plaque forming in your arteries. This raises your risk of heart disease and stroke.

One year after quitting, your risk of heart attacks is cut in half. Twenty years after quitting, your risk of dying from a heart attack is as low as someone who never smoked at all.

If you would like help quitting, visit www.albertaquits.ca.

Be physically active

Activity helps improve your heart health and lower your risk for heart disease and other health conditions.

- If you're not active now, check with your healthcare provider before you start being active. Start with a few minutes a day and increase your time slowly.
- On most days of the week, aim for 30–60 minutes of activity that makes your heart beat faster (aerobic). These activities include fast walking, swimming, bike riding, and playing sports.
- Aim for at least 2 weight training sessions each week.

For more information, see the [Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines](#) at csepguidelines.ca.

Goal setting

This handout includes several lifestyle choices that can help improve your blood cholesterol and triglycerides. Changing your lifestyle can be hard, especially if you try to make too many changes at once.

Ask your healthcare provider if you would like support with goal setting. To learn more, visit www.ahs.ca/nutritionhandouts and search 'setting goals'.

For more support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on ahs.ca/811.
- Visit ahs.ca/nutrition.
- Call, text, or chat with 211 Alberta (<https://ab.211.ca/>) to find out about financial benefits, programs, and services.

Notes
