



Ask the Dietitian

fat and cholesterol levels

My doctor told me to start watching the fat in my diet to lower my cholesterol. I have already been watching the cholesterol in foods I eat, what does fat have to do with my blood cholesterol levels?

Your doctor gave you good advice! Many of us think that by keeping the amount of cholesterol we eat low that we should be able to lower our blood cholesterol levels and protect our arteries from plaque build-up and heart attack. While this may seem to be great logic, in all actuality it is the amount and type of fat you eat each day which will have the greatest impact on your total and LDL cholesterol level. (LDL cholesterol is the “bad” cholesterol and HDL is the “good” cholesterol)

The majority of the cholesterol in your blood came from your liver. There are basically 4 types of fats in the foods we eat, 2 of which will tell your liver to make more total and LDL cholesterol and 2 of which will tell your liver to make less total and LDL cholesterol. The genes you inherited from your parents and the amount of exercise you do each day will also help determine your cholesterol levels.

The 2 fats that can raise your cholesterol are also the 2 types of fats that are solid at room temperature: Saturated and Trans Fats (aka Partially Hydrogenated Oil). You may be familiar with these 2 fats since they are required to be listed on all Nutrition Facts labels of packaged foods. These are the two fats that we should try to limit. In fact we should avoid all sources of Trans Fats or Partially Hydrogenated Oils as it will not only raise the “bad” LDL cholesterol, it can also lower the “good” HDL cholesterol!

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For further information please call our office and ask to speak to one of our Registered Dietitians
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Expertise in Matters of the Heart

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The 2 fats that can help lower your cholesterol are liquid at room temperature and are also known as oils: Monounsaturated Fats and Polyunsaturated Fats. You may not be as familiar with these fats as they are rarely listed on the Nutrition Facts labels, but you have eaten the before as they are the primary fat in nuts, peanut butter, cooking oils, salad dressings, avocados, and fatty fish like tuna, salmon and trout. This chart may help:

Type of Fat	Sources	Amount to choose each day
Saturated Fat Raises Total and LDL Cholesterol	Meat, poultry, cream, ½&½, milk, cheese, cream cheese, butter, other high fat dairy, lard, ice cream, cured meats (bacon, sausage, salami, etc.), coconut oil, palm oil, palm kernel oil	Choose less than 7% of total calories as saturated fat. This is less than 15 g saturated fat in a 2000 calorie diet
Trans Fat Raises Total and “bad” LDL Cholesterol and lowers “good” HDL Cholesterol	Shortening, snack foods, fried fast foods, biscuits, pie dough frozen dinners, frozen pizzas, stick margarine and any food with Partially Hydrogenated Oil in the ingredients	Choose 0 g Trans Fats each day. Avoid partially hydrogenated and hydrogenated oils!
Polyunsaturated Fat (PUFA) Helps lower Total and LDL cholesterol	Fatty fish, walnuts, soy, flaxseed (sources of Omega-3); and cottonseed oil, corn oil, sunflower oil, safflower oil, soybean oil, tub margarine (sources of Omega-6)	Choose 10% of total calories as PUFA – focusing on sources for omega-3 fats This is about 20g PUFA in a 2000 calorie diet.
Monounsaturated Fat (MUFA) Helps lower Total and LDL cholesterol and may raise your HDL cholesterol	Olive oil, canola oil, avocados, nuts and all nut products (nut oils, peanut butter, etc) (Sources of omega-9)	Choose 10% - 15% of total calories as MUFA each day This is about 20-30g MUFA in a 2000 calorie diet.

Your fat needs are based on your age, activity level, weight goals, and overall health. For more information about fats, check out the Heart Center of the Rockies Facts About Fat handout or call one of our registered dietitians at (970) 221-1000 to schedule an appointment. We can help you determine your fat and overall nutrient needs based on your age, health, activity level, and health goals.