"Isn't cholesterol bad?" High cholesterol has given cholesterol a bad reputation, when in reality it is a crucial component for proper body function!
What is the common response when one hears the word "cholesterol"? Due to many health problems related to "high cholesterol," the word seems to have taken up a negative meaning all together. However, did you know that cholesterol is a crucial component for proper body function?

Read Blog Post
Top 5 Cholesterol-Lowering Foods.

This post was taken and modified from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website.

What is the common response when one hears the word “cholesterol”?

Due to the many health problems related to “high cholesterol,” the word seems to have taken up a negative meaning all together. However, did you know that cholesterol is a crucial component for proper body function? In fact, cholesterol is used by the body for cell membrane structure, hormones, and digestive juices (such as bile).

Cholesterol becomes harmful only when they exceed their normal amounts. Excess cholesterol (LDL) then start forming deposits within coronary artery walls, which poses a major cardiovascular health risk.

However, it’s important to know that not all cholesterol are harmful. In fact, there are three types: HDL, LDL, and VLDL. HDL is stated to be the “good” cholesterol because it functions to move the LDL/VLDL back to the liver to be broken down/converted for better use. On the other hand, LDL and VLDL are not beneficial to the body and just give rise to negative health effects.

That leads to the most important question. What can we do to lower/maintain a healthy cholesterol level?

Here are some great ways to help lower the “unhealthy” cholesterol levels and increase the “healthy” cholesterol levels!

Dietary Factors that Help Reduce/Reverse Risk of Heart Disease-

1. Eat Fruits and Vegetables

Packed with vitamins, minerals, the healthy plant chemicals called phytochemicals, and antioxidants, vegetables help fight low-density lipoprotein (LDL, or “bad”) cholesterol that can lead to the buildup of plaque in your arteries, a major risk factor for heart disease, heart attack, and stroke. Eat a variety of vegetables every week to get the full array of health benefits they have to offer. Fruits are excellent sources of healthy phytochemicals, antioxidants, and fiber, too.

2. Choose Healthy Fats

Not all fats are bad. You need the good ones, which include olive, canola, flax, walnut, peanut, and sesame oils. These oils help fight internal inflammation, improve cholesterol levels, boost the immune system, and keep your brain and central nervous system healthy.

The American Heart Association suggests keeping your fat intake to between 25 percent and 35 percent of your total calories each day. Keep saturated fats to less than 7 percent and consumption of trans fats should be limited to less than 1 percent of your calories every day.
3. Eat Plenty of Fiber

Eat foods high in fiber, such as barley, oatmeal, and apples, which contain soluble fiber that helps bind cholesterol in the gastrointestinal tract and carry it out of the body. Make these foods a regular part of your diet.

While oatmeal and apples are familiar foods, not everybody is used to eating barley. Try substituting barley pilaf for rice. Barley adds a chewy, nutty-tasting side dish to meals and can help reduce your cholesterol.

4. Go Nuts for Nuts

Eaten in moderation, certain nuts, such as walnuts, almonds, and peanuts, can help to lower bad cholesterol. Nuts contain healthy fats and antioxidants that can keep your cardiovascular system healthy.

Each week, you should include three to five servings of nuts. One serving of nuts is usually about one-third of a cup. But be sure to keep strict tabs on how much you eat, because nuts are also high in calories. Also, choose unsalted nuts when possible.

5. Beans Are Good for Your Heart

All variety of beans, such as kidney, chick peas (garbanzos), lentils, split peas, black-eyed peas, and white beans, are high in antioxidants and fiber, and can help improve your cholesterol profile.

6. Avoid Eating Foods with Cholesterol

All meat products contain cholesterol, and animal fat is known to be a big cause of elevated cholesterol levels. The best recommendation is to avoid meat consumption.

References:
