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CHOLESTEROL

Smart Food Choices to Lower Cholesterol

Our bodies need cholesterol. We can't live without it. But a high level of cholesterol is too much of a good thing. The best way to control your cholesterol is to make wise food choices and get enough exercise. Once you have lowered your saturated fat intake, you have taken important steps toward a healthier heart. Here are some more ideas that can help you meet your goal.

Fiber

There are 2 kinds of fiber: soluble and insoluble. While our bodies need both, it is soluble that helps to lower our cholesterol. Eating 5 to 10 grams of soluble fiber each day can decrease LDL ("bad") cholesterol by 5% to 10%. It is best to get soluble fiber from foods rather than supplements. Increase your fiber content gradually and drink lots of water (fiber without water can be constipating).

Soy Protein

Although it is not clear that soy protein alone reduces cholesterol, it may have that effect when used as a replacement for animal protein in milk or meat because animal-based foods naturally contain more cholesterol. Between 2 and 4 servings of soy each day (25 grams or more) is about right. Several healthy brands of soy milk are on the market; these have less than 2 grams of saturated fat and less than 10 grams of sugar. Tofu is a refrigerated soy product. Many meat-substitute soy products can be found in the freezer case.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3 fatty acids reduce certain fats in the bloodstream. Some fish and shellfish are rich sources of omega-3s, although anyone who could become pregnant should limit those with high mercury content.

Nuts

Replacing snacks high in saturated fats with nuts - especially almonds - can help reduce LDL and increase HDL ("good") cholesterol. Nuts contain healthy fats, but they are also high in calories; choose those without added oils and salt and don't have more than a small handful a day.

Examples of Foods That Help Control Cholesterol

Soluble fiber

- Cereal grains (barley, regular oatmeal, oat bran, whole-grain breads)
- Fruits: (prunes, citrus, strawberries, apples, pears)
- Beans and peas (dried and canned beans, peas and lentils)
- Vegetables (broccoli, brussels sprouts, carrots)

Soy Protein

- Soy milk
- Soy or veggie burgers
- Tofu

Omega-3 fatty acids

Seafood with high mercury content is to be avoided in pregnancy

- Good: shrimp, cod, catfish, clams, grouper, red snapper
- Better: pollock, crab, lobster, whitefish
- Best: salmon, herring, oysters, halibut, canned light tuna

Nuts

- Almonds
- Hazelnuts
- Pecans
- Pistachios
- English walnuts