

5 Foods That Feed Cholesterol

by Sally Wadyka for MSN Health & Fitness

There's no denying that a healthy diet is the first line of defense against rising cholesterol. "If you eat a predominantly plant-based diet—with lots of fruits and vegetables plus some fish—you are on the right track to keeping your cholesterol at a healthy level," says Lisa Dorfman, a registered dietitian and spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association. That said, certain so-called super-foods can actually help lower bad cholesterol and/or increase the good cholesterol. Ideally, you want to shoot for total cholesterol under 200, with LDL (the bad one) under 110 and HDL (the good one) greater than 35.

Try to reduce—or better yet, eliminate—these bad-for-you foods from your repertoire:

Whole-milk dairy products

Saturated fat, which clogs arteries and increases LDL levels, is the No. 1 cholesterol-boosting culprit. And foods like ice cream and cheese are where you're likely to find them. Swap out the Ben & Jerry's Chubby Hubby for a lower-fat frozen yogurt, and skip the brie in favor of something less rich, like a part-skim mozzarella.

Processed meats

Bacon, sausage, liverwurst and the like are also wonderful sources of artery-clogging saturated fat. Look for lower-fat options, like bacon and sausage made from turkey and other lean protein sources.

Fast-food fries

Even worse than saturated fats are the dreaded trans fats. "You might as well take a gun and shoot yourself!" says Dorfman. The main source of trans fats are partially hydrogenated oils, and that's exactly what most fast-food restaurants are still using to cook their fries. Trans fats hit cholesterol with a double whammy—in addition to raising your LDL, they simultaneously lower your HDL.

Tropical oils

Palm kernel and coconut oils are two of the fattiest of oils—100 percent of the bad-for-you saturated variety. Don't use them when you cook at home, and try to avoid them when you eat out (most fast-food restaurants have eliminated them, but you can check their Web sites for detailed nutritional information). Use heart-healthy mono- and polyunsaturated fats, like olive, canola and safflower oil, instead.

Baked goods

Many manufacturers of packaged cookies and cakes have eliminated trans fats from their recipes, but check the nutrition labels to be sure. But all baked goods—even those that are homemade—are high in saturated fats, thanks to the butter and shortening. Since no one wants to give up dessert completely, eat high-fat baked goods only occasionally, opting more often for low-fat sweets like sorbets.