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# Reader's Digest

## 12 Foods That Help Lower Cholesterol

By Jill Waldbieser

Protect your heart by eating more foods that have a beneficial effect on cholesterol. Here are the experts' favorites.



High cholesterol is considered a risk factor for developing cardiovascular disease, the top cause of deaths in the country and worldwide. One of the most effective ways to keep cholesterol in check is completely within your control: Watch what you eat. But that gets tricky when the rules for healthy eating have changed. “To understand how diet can affect your cholesterol, we first have to set the record straight,” says **Elroy Vojdani, MD, IFMCP**. “The story we heard in the ’80s and ’90s, that cholesterol in foods you heat can affect the cholesterol in your blood, is incorrect.” More recent research has shown that other kinds of foods can affect your cholesterol and your heart health—here are the ones experts favor.

### Olives and olive oil

“Various studies have shown that olive oil or an olive oil–rich diet lowers the levels of total blood cholesterol,” says Amy Riolo, author of the forthcoming book *The Mediterranean Diabetes Cookbook*. In



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a study of people with high cholesterol, blood samples taken just two hours after subjects ate a meal with olive oil showed less potential for harmful clotting compared to subjects who ate a meal cooked with corn oil. That may explain the low incidence of heart problems in countries where olive oil is the main cooking fat. If you're curious what makes olive oil rank as extra-virgin, find the answer [here](#).

### Avocado

When you replace saturated fats like those found in animal products—beef, bacon, butter—with mono- or polyunsaturated fats from plant sources like avocados, the impact on cholesterol is dramatic, says Dr. Vojdani. Levels of LDL, the kind of cholesterol that contributes to plaque buildup that can cause arterial blockages, decrease. At the same time, HDL or healthy cholesterol, which plays a role in clearing LDL cholesterol from the body, increases, says Dr. Vojdani. Here's the secret to keeping your avocados fresh for months.

### Wild salmon

Fish is another excellent food choice. Fish is loaded with healthy monounsaturated fats, which have a beneficial effect on cholesterol, Dr. Vojdani says. Wild salmon is one of the top dietary sources of healthy fats and its ratio of omega-3s to omega-6s (two types of fatty acids) can help lower LDL counts. These are the 7 best fish to eat—plus 5 to avoid.

### Onions

No more tears—this culinary staple has been shown to lower LDL cholesterol levels, and it's likely due to a flavonoid known as quercetin, which acts as an antioxidant that helps prevent cholesterol from clogging arteries. Raw, onions may not be quite as effective, though: Some research indicates that onions in cooked dishes had a more profound impact on blood cholesterol. Onion's culinary cousins, including garlic and leeks, have a similar effect. "Mediterranean lore is full of tales about leeks, most of which have recently been proved to be true," says Riolo. They can reduce bad cholesterol, increase good cholesterol, and maintain healthy blood pressure levels." Here are guaranteed ways to keep from crying when you chop onions.

### Oats

Oats, bran, and other whole grains are great sources of soluble fiber, a nutrient that can bind to dietary cholesterol and prevent it from being absorbed by the body, says Dr. Vojdani. "For many people, that may be enough to achieve meaningful results," he says. Learn exactly how much fiber you need to eat to prevent heart disease.

### Beans

Most Americans don't eat enough legumes—beans, peas, chickpeas, and lentils. Here's a good reason to up your intake: A study published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal found that having just a single serving a day for six weeks lowered LDL cholesterol by 5 percent. Beans and other legumes have a



good deal of fiber and antioxidants, both of which beneficially effect cholesterol. Check out how beans can also help you shed excess pounds.

#### Turmeric

This bright yellow spice, often used in curries, is a potent anti-inflammatory agent and can also help reduce LDL levels in our blood, according to Dr. Vojdani. Even low doses of its active ingredient, curcumin, can reduce total and LDL cholesterol in patients with coronary disease, research suggests. Here's how much turmeric you need to lower inflammation.

#### Soy

Tofu, edamame, soy milk—any soy-based food is a good source phytosterols, compounds that are structurally similar to the cholesterol your liver produces. When you eat these foods, your body absorbs less cholesterol—simply getting the recommended amount of soy per day can lead to a reduction in LDL levels of up to 14 percent, says Dr. Vojdani.

#### Almonds

Almonds are a good source of both healthy fats and fiber, two nutrients that help keep cholesterol levels in check. Penn State researchers found that patients who ate almonds every day for six weeks had higher levels of healthy HDL cholesterol compared to a group that didn't get a daily dose. Here's a list of the best nuts you can eat.

#### Butter

Once considered totally unhealthy because of its saturated fat, butter was blacklisted, and we were all encouraged to eat margarine instead. But now that the saturated fat myth has been debunked, butter is back—and science has proven margarine to be the unhealthier option, when it contains trans fats or partially hydrogenated oils. Unlike some other cooking fats, butter does contain important nutrients, including fatty acids and fat-soluble vitamins. This doesn't mean you can eat unlimited amounts, but as part of a healthy diet grass-fed butter can take its place with other healthy fats like olive oil. Stay away from these 7 shocking foods that contain trans fats.

#### Dark chocolate

The list of foods that lower cholesterol includes a sweet surprise! Dark chocolate has large amounts of flavonoids, which are antioxidant compounds that help fight inflammation and can lower LDL, says Dr. Vojdani. In one study, participants who consumed both dark chocolate and cocoa daily for four weeks watched their cholesterol drop by roughly 4 percent. Find out the best grade of dark chocolate for your health here.

#### Red wine



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Resveratrol, a compound found in cabernet and red wines, can prevent damage to the linings of blood vessels. This helps prevent plaque build up, and may lower LDL, says Dr. Vojdani. Of course, drinking it in moderation is key. “This potential benefit likely disappears once you pass the two-glass threshold,” he says, “as the amount of alcohol will counteract the antioxidant benefit.” You can also get the benefits of resveratrol from eating grapes. Learn what happens to your body when you drink a glass of red a day.

<https://www.rd.com/health/healthy-eating/foods-lower-cholesterol/>