

Health

HEART HEALTH

12 Foods That Lower Cholesterol Naturally

By [STACEY COLINO](#) DECEMBER 22, 2014 [WRITE A COMMENT](#)



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If you're already eating plenty of the following [cholesterol-lowering foods](#), keep up the good work! But if your idea of eating well is to opt for the "buttered popcorn" instead of the "extra-buttered popcorn," consider adding these healthy eats to your diet today:

1. Oats

If you're looking to lower your cholesterol, the key may be simply changing your morning meal. Switching up your breakfast to contain two servings of oats can lower LDL cholesterol (the bad kind) by 5.3% in only 6 weeks. The key to this cholesterol buster is beta-glucan, a substance in oats that absorbs LDL, which your body then excretes. Banish bland oats with this [dessert-worthy ginergersnap oatmeal recipe](#).

2. Red wine

Scientists are giving us yet another reason to drink to our health. It turns out that high-fiber Tempranillo red grapes, used to make red wine like Rioja, may actually have a significant effect on cholesterol levels. A study conducted by the department of metabolism and nutrition at Universidad Complutense de

Madrid in Spain found that when individuals consumed the same grape supplement found in red wine, their LDL levels decreased by 9%. In addition, those who had [high cholesterol](#) going into the study saw a 12% drop in LDL.

3. Salmon & fatty fish

Omega-3 fats are one of the natural health wonders of the world and have been shown to ward off heart disease, [dementia](#), and many other diseases. Now these fatty acids can add yet another health benefit to their repertoire: lowering cholesterol. According to research from Loma Linda University, replacing saturated fats with omega-3s like those found in salmon, sardines, and herring can raise good cholesterol as much as 4%. (Here's everything you need to know about [buying the healthiest fish possible](#).)

[Are you at risk for the #1 cause of heart-related death?](#)

4. Nuts

If you're looking to lower cholesterol levels, research shows that you should get cracking! In a study published by the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, people who noshed on 1.5 ounces of whole walnuts 6 days a week for 1 month lowered their total cholesterol by 5.4% and LDL cholesterol by 9.3%. Almonds and cashews are other good options. However, while nuts are heart healthy, they're also high in calories, so practice portion control—1.5 ounces is about a shot glass and a half. Use a shot glass to measure out your portion so you can see exactly how it looks.

5. Tea



Photo by gojack/Getty Images

While tea has become well known for its cancer-fighting antioxidants, it is also a great defense against LDL cholesterol levels. According to research conducted with the USDA, black tea has been shown to reduce blood lipids by up to 10% in only 3 weeks. These findings were concluded in a larger study of how tea may also help reduce the risk of coronary heart disease. (Here's [how to make the perfect cup of tea](#) every time.)

MORE: [The Healthiest Teas To Drink From Morning To Night](#)

6. Beans

Beans, beans—they really are good for your heart. Researchers at Arizona State University Polytechnic found that adding ½ cup of beans to soup lowers total cholesterol, including LDL, by up to 8%. The key to this heart-healthy food is its abundance of fiber, which has been shown to slow the rate and amount of absorption of cholesterol in certain foods. Try black, kidney, or pinto beans; each supplies about one-third of your daily fiber needs.

7. Chocolate

Ah, the sweet side of a heart-healthy diet: This powerful antioxidant helps build HDL cholesterol levels. In a 2007 study published in *AJCN*, participants who were given cocoa powder had a 24% increase in HDL levels over 12 weeks, compared with a 5% increase in the control group. Remember to choose the dark or bittersweet kind. Compared to milk chocolate, it has more than 3 times as many antioxidants, which prevent blood platelets from sticking together and may even keep arteries unclogged.

8. Margarine

Switching to a margarine with plant sterols, such as Promise active or Benecol, could help lower cholesterol. Plant sterols are compounds that reduce cholesterol absorption; a study published in *AJCN* found that women who had a higher plant sterol-based diet were able to lower total cholesterol by 3.5%.

9. Garlic

Aside from adding zing to almost any dish, garlic has been found to lower cholesterol, prevent blood clots, reduce blood pressure, and protect against infections. Now research finds that it helps stop artery-clogging plaque at its earliest stage by keeping cholesterol particles from sticking to artery walls. Try for two to four fresh cloves a day.

10. Olive oil



Photo by Okea/Getty Images

Good news: This common cooking ingredient can help your health. Olive oil is full of heart-healthy monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs), which lower LDL cholesterol—and have the welcome side effect of trimming belly fat. Use it to make your own salad dressings, marinate chicken and fish, or roast vegetables.

11. Spinach

This popular green contains lots of lutein, the sunshine-yellow pigment found in dark green leafy vegetables and egg yolks. Lutein already has a "golden" reputation for guarding against age-related [macular degeneration](#), a leading cause of blindness. Now research suggests that just ½ cup of a lutein-rich food daily also guards against heart attacks by helping artery walls "shrug off" cholesterol invaders that cause clogging. Look for bags of baby spinach leaves that you can use for salads or pop in the microwave for a quick side dish.

MORE: [3 Recipes To Take Your Love Of Spinach To A Whole New Level](#)

12. Avocado

Avocados are a great source of heart-healthy monounsaturated fat, a type of fat that may actually help raise HDL cholesterol while lowering LDL. And, more than any other fruit, this delectable food packs cholesterol-smashing beta-sitosterol, a beneficial plant-based fat that reduces the amount of cholesterol absorbed from food. Since avocados are a bit high in calories and fat (300 calories and 30 g fat per avocado), use them in moderation. (We suggest these [8 unique and insanely tasty avocado recipes](#).)