

# Five tips for lowering cholesterol



**Lisa Yates**  
Advanced  
Accredited  
Practising  
Dietitian

WITH one in two Australian adults having elevated blood cholesterol,<sup>1</sup> and so many patients using statin medications,<sup>1</sup> diet solutions are often forgotten as an important adjunct therapy. Here are five tips to help reduce cholesterol.

## 1. Healthy fats

It is no longer appropriate to just recommend a low-fat diet to those with high blood cholesterol. The healthy fats (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats) are required by the body to help regulate cholesterol production, particularly LDL cholesterol.

Since the liver makes blood cholesterol from the saturated fat that we eat, a low saturated fat diet is recommended by health authorities such as the National Heart Foundation.<sup>2</sup>

Saturated fats are found mainly in animal foods such as full-fat dairy, butter, cream and fatty meats, plus high-fat cakes, biscuits, crackers and takeaway foods.

## 2. Omega-3s

There are two types of omega-3s in the diet: short chain (plant) or long chain (marine). Long chain omega-3s, such as EPA and DHA, have been shown to increase HDL (good) cholesterol while also reducing triglycerides, another unhealthy blood fat.<sup>2</sup>

Short chain omega-3s or ALA are found in walnuts, pecans, flaxseed and linseeds, and about 2 g of ALA a day can reduce

the risk of heart disease.<sup>1</sup> That's about 30 g of walnuts.

## 3. Nuts

A meta-analysis combining the results of 25 nut and cholesterol-lowering studies found that around two handfuls of nuts – 67 g on average each day – significantly reduced total and LDL cholesterol by 5% and 7% respectively.<sup>3</sup>

This is supported by two other meta-analyses specifically on almonds and walnuts, which also support eating at least a handful a day to significantly lower total and LDL cholesterol.<sup>4,5</sup>

## 4. Soluble fibre

Soluble fibre helps lower blood cholesterol by reducing cholesterol reabsorption in the intestine, excreting it from the body.<sup>6,7</sup>

Soluble fibre is found in psyllium, oats, legumes, nuts and skins on fruits and vegetables.

## 5. Plant sterols

Plant sterols are substances that can help to lower cholesterol levels in the blood by reducing cholesterol reabsorption in the intestine.<sup>8</sup>

They are found naturally in plant foods such as nuts or in plant sterol fortified foods such as margarine, milk and cheese.

About 2–2.5 g of plant sterols a day is recommended to lower blood LDL cholesterol by around 10–15%, which is two to three serves of these foods.<sup>8</sup>

Also suggest patients boost their beta-carotene intake by eating an orange-coloured fruit or vegetable every day since plant sterols reduce the absorption of beta-carotene too.<sup>8</sup>

References at [medobs.com.au/primary-care-nurse](http://medobs.com.au/primary-care-nurse)

*Lisa Yates also consults to the Australian Tree Nut Industry*