Lowering your cholesterol – first steps: reduce saturated fats

If you have been diagnosed with a high cholesterol level, this leaflet explains some simple changes you can make to your diet to reduce your intake of saturated fat. If you have any further questions, please speak to the dietitian caring for you.

What is high cholesterol and why have I got it?

Cholesterol is a fatty substance. It is carried around your body in your blood by proteins. In the right amounts, cholesterol is useful for building cell walls, producing hormones and helping your body digest fats. There are two types of cholesterol, known as ‘good cholesterol’ and ‘bad cholesterol’. Too much ‘bad’ cholesterol (also known as low-density lipoprotein – LDL) can cause fatty material to build up in your artery walls. This fatty material can make your arteries get narrower or blocked up. This increases your risk of having a heart attack or stroke. This risk is particularly high if you have high levels of ‘bad’ cholesterol and low levels of ‘good’ cholesterol (also known as high-density lipoprotein – HDL).

Why might I have high cholesterol?

There are several reasons why someone may have high cholesterol, these include:

- eating a diet that is high in saturated fat
- smoking
- lack of physical activity
- high alcohol intake
- kidney or liver disease
- having an inherited condition called familial hypercholesterolaemia.

Why is fat important?

A diet high in saturated fats or trans fats can lead to high cholesterol levels.

**Saturated fats** are mainly found in animal products such as butter, cream, full-fat dairy and the fat on meat. They can also be high in processed foods such as cakes, biscuits and pre-prepared meals.

**Trans fats** may be found in some processed foods, especially meats.

Fats from plants, vegetable and oily fish sources are called **polyunsaturated** and **monounsaturated fats**. These fats are much better for you and can help reduce your levels of bad cholesterol. However, it is important to note that even these good types of fats contain high
numbers of calories, which can make you put on weight. It is therefore important to consume these in moderate amounts.

**How can I reduce my saturated fat intake?**

This table represents foods that have high, medium and low levels of saturated fats. However, in order to help you make the best choices it also considers other qualities of foods, such as the amount of salt, calories or sugar they contain.

Foods from the green section are low in fat; these should make up the most of your diet. Foods in the yellow section should be consumed in moderation and foods in the red section should be consumed very rarely.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food group</th>
<th>Green Healthiest choice</th>
<th>Yellow Consume in moderation</th>
<th>Red Consume on occasion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cereal foods and potatoes</td>
<td>• Bread and flour&lt;br&gt;• Porridge oats&lt;br&gt;• Cereals&lt;br&gt;• Pasta&lt;br&gt;• Rice&lt;br&gt;• Baked or boiled potatoes&lt;br&gt;• Aim for wholegrain options, which contain more fibre and can have an additional beneficial effect on lowering cholesterol</td>
<td>• Plain biscuits eg rich tea&lt;br&gt;• Plain or fruit scones&lt;br&gt;• Oven chips&lt;br&gt;• Naan bread&lt;br&gt;• Chapatis&lt;br&gt;• Rotis&lt;br&gt;• Sugar-coated cereals</td>
<td>• Fried bread&lt;br&gt;• Cakes&lt;br&gt;• Non-plain biscuits&lt;br&gt;• Pastries&lt;br&gt;• Puddings&lt;br&gt;• Chips&lt;br&gt;• Fried or roast potatoes&lt;br&gt;• Crisps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit, vegetables and nuts</td>
<td>• All fresh, frozen vegetables and fruit&lt;br&gt;• Beans&lt;br&gt;• Lentils&lt;br&gt;• Dried fruit&lt;br&gt;• Canned fruit in juice</td>
<td>• Reduced-fat coleslaw&lt;br&gt;• Prepared salad with reduced fat dressing&lt;br&gt;• Canned fruit in syrup (this is higher in sugar than fruit in juice)</td>
<td>• Fruits and vegetables cooked with butter, cream or cheese&lt;br&gt;• Deep fried battered fruits or vegetables eg fritters or tempura</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### How can I tell if a food is high in fat?

Some food labels now have a **traffic light system**, which is a quick way to tell whether a product is low in fat. Simply look at the label for fat and choose items with the green label. Most foods also show how much fat is per 100g in the food. Use the guide below to help you decide if a food is low in fat or saturated fat:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fat per 100g</th>
<th>Saturated Fat per 100g</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Green – low in fat</td>
<td>3g or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow – medium fat</td>
<td>3.1 – 17.5g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red – high in fat</td>
<td>17.5g or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Useful sources of information

**British Heart Foundation**
Charity that funds research, education, care and awareness campaigns aimed to prevent heart disease. Provides information and resources on cardiovascular health.

**t:** 0300 330 3322  
**e:** supporterservices@bhf.org.uk  
**w:** www.bhf.org.uk
Contact us
If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the nutrition and dietetics department on 020 7188 2010 or 020 7188 4128 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm). If we are unable to take your call, please leave us a message and we will call you back.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline
If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns
For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

PALS: 020 7188 8801  
Complaints: 020 7188 3514

Language Support Services
If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

Language Support Services: 020 7188 8815

NHS 111
Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

NHS 111: 111

NHS Choices
Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust
Members of Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, and to become a member:

Get involved and have your say: 0800 731 0319

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