

Lowering your cholesterol: first steps – reducing saturated fats

If you have been diagnosed with a high cholesterol level, this leaflet explains some simple changes you can make to your diet and lifestyle to help to lower it. 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. These cholesterol and protein bodies are called lipoproteins. In the right amounts, cholesterol is useful for building cell walls, producing hormones and helping your body digest fats. There are several types of lipoprotein, which can be divided into two main types.

High-density lipoproteins (HDL) known as 'good cholesterol'.

Non-high density lipoproteins (non-HDL) known as 'bad cholesterol'.

Too much **non-HDL** 'bad cholesterol' can cause fatty material to build up in your artery walls, making your arteries get narrower or blocked up – known as atherosclerosis. This increases your risk of having a heart attack or stroke. This risk is particularly high if you have high levels of **non-HDL** 'bad cholesterol' and low levels of **HDL** 'good cholesterol'.

You may have also heard about **low-density lipoprotein (LDL)**, which was previously used as the main measure of 'bad cholesterol', but we now know that other forms of non-HDL cholesterol are harmful.

As well as cholesterol, blood contains another type of fatty substance called **triglycerides**. These can also contribute to the narrowing of the artery walls, increasing your risk of cardiovascular disease.

Why might I have high cholesterol?

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

- a diet that is high in saturated fats
- smoking
- lack of physical activity
- too much body fat, especially around the abdomen
- high alcohol intake
- kidney or liver disease
- having an inherited condition called familial hypercholesterolaemia.

Why is fat important?

A diet high in saturated 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. Most UK manufacturers do not include trans fats in their products, and they are unlikely to be found in margarine for example, however this may not be the same for imported products. Check labels for '**partially hydrogenated fat**' in the list of ingredients. Takeaways may also use cooking oils which include trans fats.

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.

The tables below show foods that contain larger amounts of saturated and unsaturated fats.

Limit saturated and trans fats	
Saturated fats	Trans fats (these foods may contain trans fats – check labels for 'partially hydrogenated fat')
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Butter • Cheese • Whole milk • Cream • Fat on meat • Poultry skin, eg chicken, duck, turkey • Processed meat, eg sausages, salami, pâté • Biscuits and cakes • Lard, dripping, suet and ghee • Coconut and palm oil • Pastry made with butter or suet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pastries • Biscuits and cakes • Takeaways • Hard margarines • Fried foods

Choose unsaturated fats <i>*note that excessive amounts may lead to weight gain</i>	
Monounsaturated fats	Polyunsaturated fats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Olive oil and rapeseed (vegetable) oil • Avocado • Nuts and seeds (almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, peanuts and pistachios) • Some spreads, eg those made with olive oil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corn oil, sunflower oil and soya oil • Nuts and seeds (walnuts, pine nuts, sesame seeds, flax/linseeds and sunflower seeds) • Oily fish, eg herring, mackerel, pilchards, sardines, salmon, trout and fresh tuna • Some spreads, eg those made with sunflower oil

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:

	Fat per 100g	Saturated fat per 100g
Green – low in fat	3g or less	1.5g or less
Amber – medium fat	3.1-17.5g	1.5-5g
Red – high in fat	17.5g or more	5g or more

Replacing saturated fat

It is important to consider what you replace saturated fat in your diet with. Choose to replace saturated fats with healthier mono- and poly-unsaturated fats and wholegrains rather than refined carbohydrates and sugary foods, to help lower your cholesterol and risk of cardiovascular disease.

A Mediterranean-style diet which is based on vegetables, fruits, wholegrain cereals, beans, fish, nuts and unsaturated fat rather than saturated fat has been shown to be helpful for cholesterol levels.

See our diet sheet, **Lowering your cholesterol – next steps** for some tips to help lower your cholesterol further.

Useful sources of information

British Heart Foundation

Charity that funds research, education, and 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 **t:** 020 7188 2010 or **t:** 020 7188 4128 (Monday to Friday, 9am-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 **w:** 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.

t: 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

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.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

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.

t: 111

NHS website

Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing.

w: 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, please get in touch.

t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

Was this leaflet useful?

We want to make sure the information you receive is helpful to you. If you have any comments about this leaflet, we would be happy to hear from you, fill in our simple online form, **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets, or **e:** patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk

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