

February 2026  
Community Dining  
716-438-4020

Published by the Niagara County Office for the Aging  
111 Main Street Lockport NY 14094



## Understanding Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a fat, waxy-like substance found in the body, produced by our livers. Our bodies use cholesterol to build cells, produce vitamins and hormones, and it helps our livers make bile to break down food. However, like all things, too much can be a bad thing... But first let's learn about the different types of cholesterol.

### Different Kinds of Cholesterol

If you have ever looked at your blood work, you have probably noticed about 3-4 different types of cholesterol on your lipid panel, each having their own value. But what do they mean?

**HDL-** High-density lipoprotein, often referred to as the “good cholesterol.” A high level of HDL cholesterol is often associated with lower risk of heart disease and stroke. This lipoprotein will carry LDL cholesterol away from our arteries and back to our livers to be broken down.

**LDL-** Low-density lipoprotein, you have probably heard this called the “bad cholesterol.” High levels of this lipoprotein carries fat and deposits it in our arteries. This causes the buildup of plaque our arteries, causing them to narrow. A high level of LDL cholesterol increases the risk of heart disease and stroke.

**VLDL-** Very-low-density lipoprotein, this is another “bad cholesterol.” Help our body gain and store energy and regulate blood pressure. High levels cause plaque buildup in our arteries

**Triglycerides-** this is the most common type of fat found in our bodies. Not the same as cholesterol, but triglycerides are carried by lipoproteins, like LDL and VLDL, to get to where they need to be in our bodies. Our body will store extra sugar and alcohol that we eat and drink in the form of triglycerides to use them later for energy. Your body will store extra triglycerides in fat cells. Higher levels of triglycerides put us at a higher risk of heart disease and stroke.

**Non-HDL Cholesterol-** refers to all the cholesterol in your blood, minus HDL cholesterol. So essentially, it is a magnified look into our bad cholesterol.

### Where does Cholesterol Come From?

Our livers produce all the cholesterol our body needs. Animal-based foods also contain cholesterol as well. However, foods high in dietary cholesterol do not significantly impact our blood cholesterol levels. Actually, foods high in saturated fat and refined or added sugars have the biggest impact on our blood cholesterol.

Coconut and palm kernel oils are to plant-based fats that are high in saturated fat, therefore they have a negative impact on our blood cholesterol levels. These are often found in baked goods.

### How to Lower Cholesterol Levels?

First, discuss what route of action is best for you with your doctor and healthcare team. In some cases, your doctor

may recommend medication as the best route for you. What we eat can also have a big impact on our cholesterol levels as well. Following a balanced diet consisting of whole grains, fruits, vegetables and lean protein sources will have great benefits on your health.

#### ✓ **CHOOSE**

##### **Heart Healthy Fats**

- Choose unsaturated fats like olive oil, avocado oil or canola oil when cooking.
- Limit saturated fats.



##### **Whole Grains**

- Strive to make at least ½ your grains whole.
- Choose whole wheat bread, whole grain pasta, brown rice and whole grain cereals.
- When making baked goods, use whole wheat flour.



##### **Fruits and Vegetables**

- Fresh, frozen or canned! Include them at every meal and incorporate them into snacks.
- Choose canned fruits packaged in water or 100% juice.
- Choose frozen and canned vegetables without added sauces or sodium (read the nutrition facts label!)



##### **Lean Protein Sources**

- Substitute ground beef for poultry like turkey and chicken in recipes, or choose ground beef that is at least 93% lean.
- When choosing red meats, look for “loin” or “round” in the name like *top round*, *sirloin* or *pork loin*.
- Eat fish at least 2x per week.
- Try to incorporate more plant based proteins into your diet like beans and tofu.
- And yes.... Eggs are recommended!



##### **Exercise!!**

- Physical activity is the one proven way to raise your HDL cholesterol

#### ✗ **AVOID**

##### **Saturated Fats**

- Marbled red meats, full fat milk/cheese/yogurt, butter, coconut and palm kernel oil

##### **Alcohol and Smoking**

- Limit alcohol consumption as much as possible. One serving is equal to 12oz of beer, 5oz of wine or 1.5oz of spirits.
- Talk to your doctor about smoking cessation programs

##### **Refined Carbohydrates**

- Reduce intake of table sugar, cookies, cakes, ice cream, baked goods and sugar sweetened beverages. Read the nutrition facts label and look for items 5% Daily Value or lower per serving.

Source: <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/cholesterol/about>  
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/23922-what-is-cholesterol>