

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.

Food group	Green Healthiest choice	Yellow Consume in moderation	Red Consume on occasion
Cereal foods and potatoes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bread and flour • Porridge oats • Cereals • Pasta • Rice • Baked or boiled potatoes • Aim for wholegrain options, which contain more fibre and can have an additional beneficial effect on lowering cholesterol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plain biscuits eg rich tea • Plain or fruit scones • Oven chips • Naan bread • Chapatis • Rotis • Sugar-coated cereals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fried bread • Cakes • Non-plain biscuits • Pastries • Puddings • Chips • Fried or roast potatoes • Crisps
Fruit, vegetables and nuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All fresh, frozen vegetables and fruit • Beans • Lentils • Dried fruit • Canned fruit in juice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced-fat coleslaw • Prepared salad with reduced fat dressing • Canned fruit in syrup (this is higher in sugar than fruit in juice) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruits and vegetables cooked with butter, cream or cheese • Deep fried battered fruits or vegetables eg fritters or tempura
Fish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All fish or seafood – best cooked in the oven, steamed or grilled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish fingers or fish cakes cooked in the oven • Canned fish in brine (this is high in salt) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Battered or breaded fish • Fish served in heavy cream, cheese or butter sauces
Meat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lean white meat such as chicken and turkey breast (without skin). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lean ham, beef, pork, and lamb • Lean mince • Liver and kidney 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visible fat on meat • Crackling • Sausages • Pâtés • Duck, goose • Meat pies and pasties • Processed meats are high in salt and trans fats

Eggs, dairy foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skimmed or semi-skimmed milk • Cottage cheese • Low-fat yoghurt • Boiled, griddled or poached eggs • Unsweetened soya milk with added calcium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edam • Camembert • Eggs • Low fat cheese • Reduced fat cream, crème fraiche and yogurts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole, evaporated or condensed Milk • Cream • Ice cream • Most hard cheeses • Chocolate • Cream cheese • Eggs cooked with lots of butter or cheese
Fats and spreads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-fat spreads • Margarine high in polyunsaturates • Corn oil, sunflower oil and olive oil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Butter • Dripping and lard • Margarine not high in polyunsaturates
Drinks and soups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tea and coffee • Skimmed or semi-skimmed milk • Mineral water • Fruit juices – limit to one glass a day and aim for fresh or from concentrate rather than juice drinks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Packet soups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cream soups • Milky drinks eg hot chocolate or milky coffees using full milk

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
Yellow – medium fat	3.1 – 17.5g	1.5 – 5g
Red – high in fat	17.5g or more	5g or more

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.

t: 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.

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

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

Language 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 Choices

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

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, and to become a member:

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