

As promised last week, here are the top 10 cholesterol fighting foods. If you already eat them, that's great and please continue! If many of these seem foreign to you, do your best to try to incorporate them into your eating on a regular basis. Although these foods have added benefits, they are not the elusive "magic bullet" so you still need to limit saturated and trans fats and cholesterol foods as part of your heart healthy eating.

1. **Soy**—It's available in many forms (tofu, soy nuts, soy flour, and soy milk) and can be used as a meat and cheese substitute to reduce saturated fat. The beneficial compounds known as isoflavones also work to reduce LDL (bad) cholesterol.
2. **Beans**—Except for wheat bran, no food is more fiber-rich than beans. They contain primarily cholesterol-lowering soluble fiber. Keep your cupboards stocked with canned beans of all types and you'll always have the makings for a healthful dinner on hand. They can also be added to salads, soups, chili, and pureed for a sandwich spread. (Rinse canned beans before using to reduce sodium content).
3. **Salmon**—This fatty fish is rich in omega 3 fatty acids that help to lower LDL (bad) cholesterol, raise HDL (good) cholesterol and lower triglycerides. Other fish high in these beneficial fats are tuna, rainbow trout, anchovies, herring, sardines and mackerel. Aim for 2 servings each week!
4. **Avocado**—Avocados are a great source of heart healthy monounsaturated fat and also offer beta-sitosterol, a plant based fat that reduces the amount of cholesterol absorbed from food. They are high in calories due to their fat content (average avocado=300 calories) so use them in place of sour cream or other high calorie condiments.
5. **Garlic**—Garlic appears to keep individual cholesterol molecules from adhering to the walls of arteries. It is easy to add this to many things you cook and it adds wonderful flavor. You may find it easier to use garlic that is already minced and sold in a jar.
6. **Spinach**—This deep green vegetable contains lots of lutein which guards against age-related macular degeneration and also heart attacks as it appears as little as ½ cup per day helps artery walls "shrug off" cholesterol to prevent clogging of the arteries.
7. **Cholesterol-cutting Margarines**—These products work by blocking the absorption of cholesterol in your food as well as that produced in your liver. There are several brands (Benecol, Take Control, and Smart Balance) and they have added plant sterols. Studies suggest as little as 2 servings daily can drop total cholesterol by 6-10% and LDL (bad) cholesterol by 7-14%.
8. **Walnuts, Cashews and Almonds**—These nuts offer healthy monounsaturated fat as well as many other beneficial nutrients (walnuts also have the omega-3 fatty acids found in fatty fish). Studies have shown people who eat nuts regularly have less heart disease and other illnesses than people who don't. The key is moderation since they are high in calories. Do not eat from the can! Aim for 2 tbsp. chopped nuts sprinkled on cereal, salad, or in yogurt five times a week or a small handful as a snack 3-4 times a week.
9. **Tea**—Whether tea is iced or hot, it provides many antioxidant compounds (flavonoids) that help to relax blood vessels which may lower blood pressure and prevent blood clots. Homemade iced tea has more antioxidants than the instant variety (A cup of hot tea has more antioxidants than many fruits and vegetables!) Try to enjoy at least one cup a day!
10. **Chocolate** (I saved the best for last!)—The dark or bittersweet chocolate has 3 times as many antioxidants (flavonoids) as milk chocolate which work to keep blood platelets from sticking together and forming clots. (White chocolate has none of these beneficial compounds!) Dove brand by Mars has been extensively and one of the small pieces known as Promises has just 2.6 gm of fat and 42 calories. It acts to boost HDL (good) cholesterol levels and prevents the LDL (bad) cholesterol from oxidizing. Remember moderation is the key!



Riddle: What fruit has its seeds on the outside and is a member of the rose family?

Answer: The strawberry and it's finally strawberry season! Local strawberries are now ready however, we can now get fresh strawberries almost year round grown and shipped from California and Florida (top strawberry producing states). Strawberries are one of my favorite foods and they are one of the most nutritious fruits you can eat! Strawberries are low in calories, virtually fat free, cholesterol free and sodium free. They provide an excellent source of potassium, vitamin C, folic acid and fiber. One cup of these luscious berries is only 45 calories, provides 150% of your daily vitamin C needs and contains close to 4 g of mainly soluble fiber which helps to lower LDL (bad) cholesterol. Strawberries also have antioxidants (including anthocyanins which give them their red color!) that have been shown to decrease the risk of certain cancers and heart disease and slow the aging process (that sounds good to me!)

Strawberries are portable and fun to eat! Just rinse and pick them up by their stems and enjoy! Many people sprinkle them with sugar however, try flavoring them with a drizzle of orange juice or even balsamic vinegar (if you are adventurous!) How about a parfait made by layering slightly crushed strawberries with yogurt or pudding and graham cracker or whole grain cereal crumbs? Strawberries are wonderful in smoothies (you can use frozen ones and skip the ice!) Strawberries make a great addition to both fruit and green salads. How about using them in a salsa to serve alongside fish or chicken? (Check out the recipes below!)

This makes a wonderful easy breakfast or special treat. Feel free to add a banana for additional flavor!

Strawberry Smoothie

(makes 2 servings)

1 and ¼ cup strawberries, rinsed and hulls removed

1 and ½ c. skim milk or nonfat yogurt

1 Tbsp. sugar

1 tsp. lemon juice or orange juice

Ice (if desired)

Put all ingredients in blender and process until smooth.

Per serving=129 calories, 8 g protein, 1 g total fat (no sat fat), 2.2 g fiber 110 mg sodium, 497 mg potassium, 4 mg cholesterol

You can make this recipe below into a complete meal by adding cooked chicken to the salad and serving with whole grain bread or crackers.

Strawberry Spinach Salad

(6 servings)

1/2 pound fresh spinach
1/2 lb fresh strawberries, hulled and halved
1/4 of a red onion, sliced
1/4 of a cucumber, sliced
1/3 cup of sliced almonds

Dressing:

1 lemon squeezed and zested (grate peel and use)
2 Tbsp. white wine vinegar
1 Tbsp olive or canola oil
1/3 c. sugar

Prepare fruit and veggies for salad. Make dressing by zesting lemon and then squeezing lemon juice into bowl. Add other dressing ingredients and stir well. Pour dressing over salad and toss just before serving.

Per serving= 139 calories, 3 g protein, 7 g total fat (1 g sat fat), 3.3 g fiber, 36 mg sodium, 275 mg potassium, 0 mg cholesterol

Spicy Fruit Salsa

(makes about 2 cups)

1 mango peeled and cut into 1/2 inch cubes
1 papaya, peeled and cut into 1/2 inch cubes
1 pint strawberries, hulled and quartered
2 Tbsp. sugar
1 serrano or jalapeno chili, seeded (wear rubber gloves!)
2 tbsp. minced fresh mint leaves

In a bowl, stir together the mango, papaya, strawberries, sugar and chili. Let mixture stand for 10 minutes. Stir in mint. Serve with grilled chicken or fish.

Strawberry Pie

(8 servings)

1 pie crust, baked (see recipe below for a heart healthy crust)
3 cups strawberries, sliced
1 cup water
2 Tbsp. cornstarch
1/2 c. sugar
1 small pkg. sugar-free strawberry Jell-O

Put sliced strawberries in pie crust. Combine water, cornstarch and sugar. Heat until sugar is melted and mixture is clear. Add Jell-O and pour over berries. Chill until set.

Per serving=188 calories, 2 g protein, 8 g total fat (1 g sat fat if made with crust below), 2 g fiber, 21 mg sodium, 102 mg potassium, 0 mg cholesterol

This crust is much lower in saturated fat and trans fat than crusts made with solid fats.

Pie crust:

1 cup all purpose flour (or use up to 1/2 cup whole wheat flour)
1/4 cup canola oil
2 Tbsp+ 1 tsp. cold water

Put flour into small mixing bowl. Add oil and water and immediately stir with a fork, making mixture into a ball. Flatten ball and place between 2 sheets of waxed paper. Roll out to circle 1 inch bigger on all sides than inverted 8 or 9-inch pie pan. Remove top sheet of waxed paper and flip pastry into pie pan. Remove remaining wax paper, smooth pastry to fit into pie pan and crimp edges. Fill with pie filling (or bake at 425 degrees for 15 minutes if pre-baked crust is called for)

Per serving=188 calories, 2 g protein, 8 g total fat (1 g sat fat if made with crust below), 2 g fiber, 21 mg sodium, 102 mg potassium, 0 mg cholesterol

However you choose to eat your strawberries, you can savor and enjoy them, knowing they are a healthy addition to your eating!

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