

KEEP *your* CHOLESTEROL *in* CHECK



Liz Alvis takes a look at the facts surrounding cholesterol and how to keep yours in the healthy range

Most people know that raised cholesterol isn't good news. It's the biggest risk factor for heart disease and heightens your risk of stroke and circulatory disease. Two thirds of the UK population have raised cholesterol, with women aged between 55 and 64 being in the highest bracket, according to the charity Heart UK. Finding out that you have raised cholesterol is naturally going to be a cause for concern, but fortunately there are steps you can take to combat this.

Good vs bad

"Cholesterol is a fatty substance which is produced in the body," explains nutritional therapy consultant Judy Watson (sunrisenutrition.co.uk). "It performs several roles including the formulation of vitamin D, the production of bile to break down fatty foods, the formation of hormones such as progesterone and it also maintains the integrity of the cell walls."

"There are two types of cholesterol: low density lipoproteins (LDL) and high density lipoproteins (HDL)," says Emily Maguire, senior nutritionist at Go Lower (golower.co.uk). "LDL is classed as 'bad' cholesterol as it can build up in the blood, sticking to the arteries and causing a plaque build up which can cause heart attacks or strokes. Ideally your LDL cholesterol level should be lower than 3.0mmol/L."

HDL is your 'good' cholesterol as it helps absorb and remove bad cholesterol, whilst protecting against heart disease and stroke. Ideally your HDL level should be around 1.0mmol/L or

greater, but many people find this difficult to achieve, particularly those following a low fat diet. Consuming a diet rich in mono and polyunsaturated fats (eg, avocados, nuts and olive oil) will help to raise your levels. It's important to take into account the ratio of your total cholesterol to your HDL cholesterol. If your total cholesterol is less than 3.0mmol/L it can mean that your good cholesterol is also low, which is something that you do not want."

Facts about fat

The liver produces cholesterol from the saturated fats in our food, which is why it's important to follow a diet low in saturated fat. This means avoiding butter, hard margarine, lard, fatty meat and dairy fats. Michele Newton, author of *Lowering Your Cholesterol: Top Tips & Recipes*, adds: "Other foods to avoid include bought pastries; cakes, biscuits; white bread, crisps, burgers and bacon. Enjoy speciality sausages as a treat, but check that they have a high meat content (over 75 per cent). Cheese should be avoided, although there are some good reduced fat versions available."

The UK's cholesterol is ninth highest in the world

In the past it was recommended to limit your egg consumption, however, Heart UK says: "For most people, the amount of saturated fat they eat has much more of an impact on their cholesterol than eating foods that contain cholesterol, like eggs and shellfish. So unless you have been advised otherwise by your

doctor eggs can be included as part of a balanced and varied diet."

The TCM view

"Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has always counselled against the consumption of too much fatty food, fried food and dairy as these produce something known as 'internal dampness,'" says acupuncturist and Chinese herbalist Jo George (lifemedicineclinic.com). "This is said to obstruct the channels through which your qi flows. However TCM experts would also advise reducing

