



The Top 12 Foods That Lower Cholesterol

If you want to lose weight and get healthy, take a look at your diet because food plays a huge role in reducing cholesterol. Exercise can help yes, but foods that lower cholesterol can do it much better, plus they protect your heart and improve your sense of well being. And the good news is it's not all vegetables either: as this list shows, a lot of the stuff here are actually delicious, and some of the foods here might pleasantly surprise you.

1- Soy

The quickest way to lower cholesterol is to cut down on saturated fat, and you can do this by substituting soy for cheese and meat (the less saturated fat you consume the better for your heart). Some of the best soy foods are enriched soy milk, soy flour, soy nuts and tofu, and in addition there are breaded nuggets, cutlets, soy sausage and more.

Crumbled soy is a good substitute for ground meat so you can use on casseroles, eggs, chili, soups, lasagna and burritos, and what makes soy effective is it soaks in the flavor from the stuff you're cooking.

2- Chocolate



Another way to lower cholesterol diet is to eat some bittersweet or dark chocolate. Compared to milk chocolate, dark chocolate has triple the number of antioxidants which stop blood platelets from coming together, and it also prevents your arteries from clogging up.

Milk chocolate also has antioxidants equal to that of red wine, but white chocolate has no flavonoid antioxidants. That being said, the amount of flavonoids that dark / bittersweet and milk chocolates have vary depending on how it is processed. For the best results, limit your intake to an ounce a day.

3- Oatmeal

Of all the foods that lower cholesterol, there's no question oatmeal and oat bran are among the best, as they are rich in soluble fiber which is necessary to reduce the bad LDL cholesterol in your system. To get the maximum benefit you must eat 1 and half cups of oatmeal a day, and it won't hurt to add more fruit to your diet like bananas. To add some variety, try oatmeal with cold cereal or steel cut oatmeal.

4- Walnuts, Almonds and Cashews



Research on what foods lower cholesterol reveals that the nuts mentioned above are rich in monounsaturated fats and are good for your heart, and they provide the same benefits as a low fat diet. These nuts are also rich in phytochemicals, copper, magnesium and vitamin E, and walnuts are full of omega 3 fatty acids. As a testament to their potency, people who eat these nuts are less vulnerable to heart disease and other ailments compared to those who don't.

However, nuts are rich in calories so you need to eat in moderation. Fill a jar full of mixed nuts and just sprinkle 2 tablespoons of them on yogurt, salads, vegetables or salad, or you can add them to dried fruits and seeds. To keep calorie levels manageable, consume no more than 2 tablespoons five days in a week.

5- Tea



Anytime you look up foods to help lower cholesterol on the web, and tea will definitely pop up. Whether it's iced or hot tea, it doesn't matter because you're still going to get a dose of healthy antioxidants. Based on studies, the reason why tea is so effective is it relaxes the blood vessels and prevents blood from clotting. The flavonoids in tea also prevent LDL cholesterol oxidation, which is a key to keeping plaques off artery walls.

Drink at least one cup of black or green tea. Both are rich in antioxidants and actually provide you with more antioxidants than any vegetable or fruit. Contrary to what some may believe, the teas sold in supermarkets are rich in antioxidants, but homemade are usually the ones with the highest concentration.

6- Spinach

If you want to know what to eat to lower cholesterol, don't forget to look up spinach, as it is rich in lutein, a yellow pigment that's found in egg yolks and dark green leafy vegetables. What makes lutein special is its muscular regeneration properties, and it helps prevent blindness.

Now health experts have learned that half a cup of lutein a day is all it takes to keep your artery walls from being infested by cholesterol, preventing the clogging that would result in heart disease. Just look for those 9 oz. spinach leaves in the supermarket that are microwave ready and you can eat the spinach as is, but if you want more flavor add some parmesan or sunflower seeds.

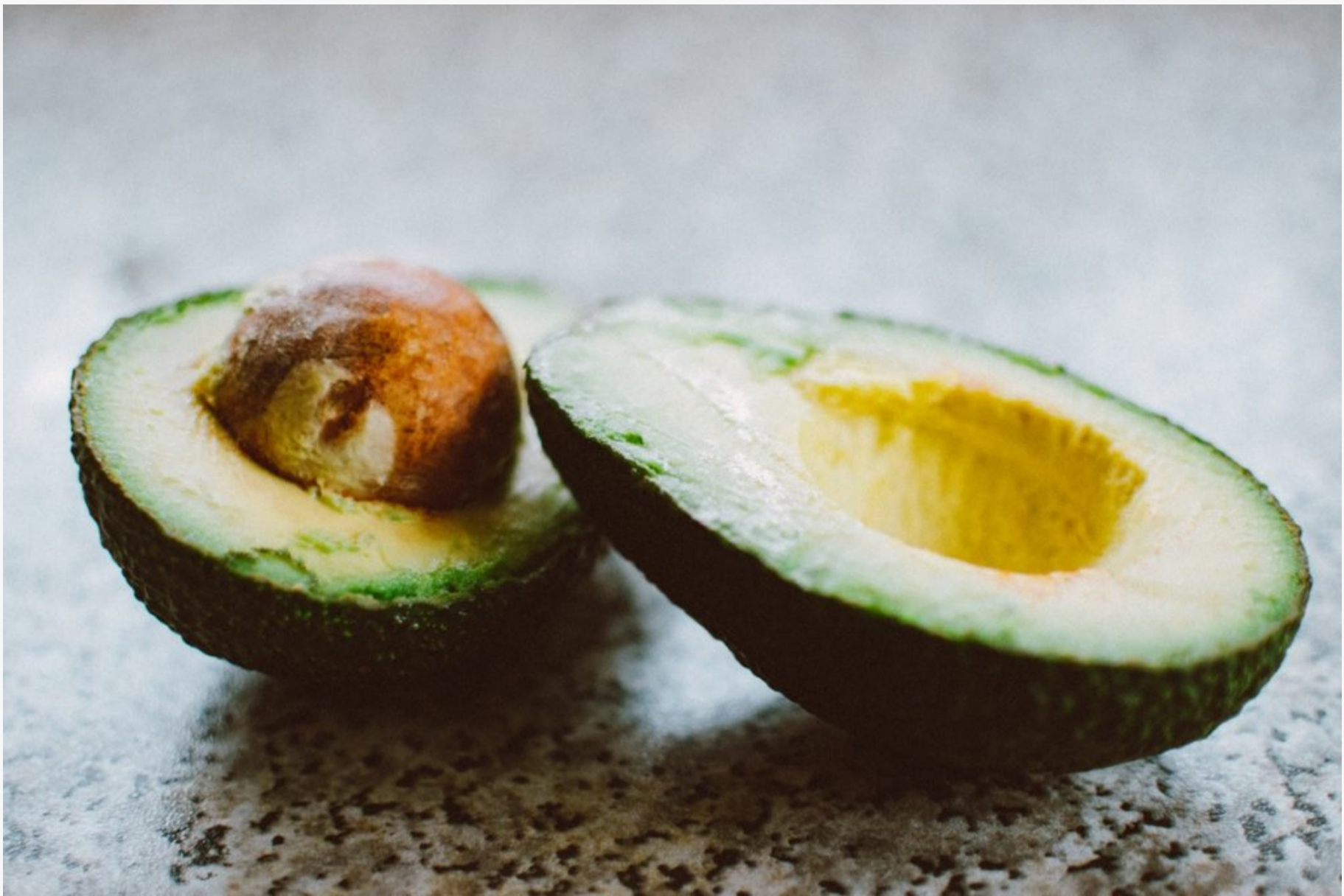
7- Garlic



No list of cholesterol lowering foods will be complete without mentioning garlic. Garlic of course, has been used for centuries to flavor food and keep vampires away. It is also responsible for weight loss, protects you against infection, lowers blood pressure and prevents blood clotting. But there's more to garlic than that because researchers have determined that garlic also keeps plaque from clogging your artery by preventing cholesterol particles from attaching to the artery walls.

When you go to the supermarket, buy garlic cloves that are freshly peeled and consume them before the expiration date. You can use garlic in a variety of dishes but if you don't feel like cooking just drop them on your pizza or soup. You don't need to eat a lot of garlic either, as two to four will do.

8- Avocado



Because avocado is a little high on calories, eat this in lieu of a high fat condiment or food. As per the American Heart Association, 15% of your daily calorie intake needs to come from monounsaturated fats, which is what avocado has. So if you're on an 1800 calorie a day diet, 15% is equal to 30 grams, which is the amount that a whole avocado has.

9- Salmon

Salmon is rich in omega 3 fatty acids, a special type of fat that reduces bad LDL cholesterol and increases good HDL cholesterol. Salmon –as well as other cold water fish- also reduce triglycerides and rich in protein, essential for muscle development.

You can also get omega 3 from mackerel, sardines, herring, anchovies, rainbow trout and white albacore tuna. According to the American Heart Association, you should eat at least two fish servings weekly, preferably those mentioned above.

10- Beans

Just like wheat bran, beans are rich in fiber which is crucial for lowering cholesterol. All you need to do is eat a cup of beans every day and it will reduce cholesterol by up to 10% in less than six weeks. All beans are healthy but the best for lowering cholesterol are butter beans, chicken pea, pinto, black and navy beans.

Beans are rich in soluble fiber, which creates a gel that attaches cholesterol and acids, keeping them from being absorbed in your body. Not only does soluble fiber lower your cholesterol, but it also reduces the risk of heart attack, so make sure you have plenty of canned beans. Aside from fiber, beans are also rich in protein and can be added to sandwich spreads, veggie chili, baked potatoes and salads.

For maximum benefits, the National Cancer Institute and the FDA recommend at least five beans a day and 30 g of fiber a day, but if you can eat more, go ahead.

11- Olive Oil



Olive oil has a powerful combination of antioxidants that reduce LDL cholesterol but don't affect your HDL level. To reduce cholesterol with olive oil, use 23 grams (2 tablespoons) every day in lieu of other fats you consume. Olive oil may be sauté with veggies, used as marinade or combined with vinegar and used as salad dressing.

Olive oil can also be used as an alternative to butter when flavoring meat or as a bread dip. However, don't use more than 2 tablespoons because olive oil is high in calories. And if you want even more health benefits, buy extra virgin olive oil, which has been subjected to less processing and has more antioxidants. That being said, regular olive oil is still effective and beneficial.

12- Foods with Stanols or Plant Sterols

Foods with stanols or sterols – substances that prevent cholesterol absorption– should be included in your diet as well. Just look for yogurt drinks, orange juice and margarine with stanols or sterols as they reduce cholesterol by up to 10%. For the best results you should consume a minimum of 2 grams daily, which is equal to two 8 ounce orange juice servings a day. Again, make sure that the juice has been fortified with sterol or stanol.

These are the best foods that lower cholesterol, but they'll only work provided you eat on a regular basis. At the same time you need to pair it up with exercise and live a healthy lifestyle. It's only going to take a couple of weeks before you start losing weight, and after a month or so you can go to a doctor and have your cholesterol level checked. If you stick to the right diet, it will go down.