

Some Things to Know About Fat

With diabetes, eating thoughtfully is important for your well-being. A healthy diet can help to regulate blood sugars, while decreasing the risk of heart disease. Eating the right kind of fats, in the right amounts, such as avocado, salmon, and nuts are part of a heart-healthy diet.

There are about [94 million](#) adults in the U.S. with high cholesterol levels. Why does this matter? Because high cholesterol is a serious health concern. It's associated with high blood pressure, heart attack, and stroke. While anyone can have high cholesterol, people living with diabetes are [twice as likely](#) to have heart disease or a stroke. This is why it's even more important to pay attention to fats in your diet.

There are steps you can take to decrease your risk. Let's take a look at what they are.

What Is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a waxy substance found in your body's cells. It has important functions in the body, but it can also cause harm. You don't actually need cholesterol in your diet, because the liver makes all you need.

There are two kinds of cholesterol:

- High-density lipoproteins (HDL) are "good" fats
- Low-density lipoproteins (LDL) are "bad" fats

Not all fats are the same, so the [types of fat](#) you choose matter for your health. While some fats can boost heart health, others can damage it. And, diabetes doesn't just affect blood sugars, it can push cholesterol levels in the wrong direction, too. This means that your HDL (good) cholesterol may decrease, while your LDL (bad) cholesterol increases.

Healthy Fats vs. Unhealthy Fats

[Nutrition Facts labels](#) break down the types of fats in the foods you're eating, so the information you need is right at your fingertips. Try to remember and take a look.

There are four types of [dietary fat](#):

- Polyunsaturated fat
- Monounsaturated fat
- Saturated fat
- Trans fat

Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats are good for heart health. Saturated and trans fats are not good for heart health. While saturated fats should be very limited, trans fats (shortening

or margarine) should be avoided as much as possible. Research shows that it's a very harmful type of fat.

Can I Overdo Fats In My Diet?

Absolutely. But just because a food contains fat, doesn't mean that it'll raise your blood cholesterol levels. A good rule of thumb is to simply eat more healthy fats and less unhealthy fats.

Saturated, or unhealthy fats, are found mostly in animal products. They include things such as: beef, butter, cheese, and poultry (with skin). The [American Heart Association \(AHA\)](#) recommends that only 5-6% of your calories come from saturated fat.

Unsaturated, or healthy fats, are found in fish and plant-based foods such as olives and olive oil, avocados, and walnuts. A healthy, fresh-food diet means that you're eating more foods in this category. Think fruits, vegetables, low-fat protein sources, and healthy oils.

Does Dietary Fat Cause High Cholesterol?

Yes, while some foods can increase cholesterol levels, others can help to lower it. Without a simple [blood test](#), you won't know if you have high cholesterol. This is because there's no symptoms associated with this condition.

It's easy to get confused about cholesterol and triglyceride levels. Both types of fat are in your bloodstream, but they're different. But because they can affect heart health, they're usually measured together.

- Triglycerides store extra calories that you've eaten for future energy.
- Cholesterol helps with digesting fats, cell health, and making vitamins and hormones.

You can decrease your risk of heart disease, and atherosclerosis (plaque buildup) in your vessels, by maintaining healthy cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

Medications For High Cholesterol

The [ADA](#) recommends statins for people ages 40 to 75 years old — in addition to lifestyle changes. Statins are medications that help to lower cholesterol and increase HDL (good) cholesterol. They're used to prevent and treat cholesterol and heart disease. While it's pretty common to be on statin medications with diabetes, not everyone takes them.

Sometimes individuals can lower their cholesterol with exercise and diet. Other times, a person may need medications. There are other factors associated with high cholesterol. Have a conversation with your provider about recommendations that are best for you.

What Lifestyle Changes Can I make?

While there are some things you can't change (family history), there are others that you can. Even if you're taking medications, the following can help to decrease your risk of [heart disease](#).

- Try your best to keep your blood sugars within the target range
- Seek help with your diabetes treatment plan, if needed
- Move your body most days of the week
- Choose more foods with healthy fats
- If you smoke or drink alcohol, try your best to decrease or stop

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