

# Facts about cholesterol

Foods labelled “no-cholesterol” or “low-cholesterol” are not necessarily heart-healthy

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## Foods labelled “no-cholesterol” or “low-cholesterol” are not necessarily heart-healthy



Most foods do not contain cholesterol (except fatty cut of meats, poultry skin, fried foods and egg yolk). Nutrition labels are useful in helping you choose heart-healthy foods. However, certain “no-cholesterol” or “low-cholesterol” foods may contain high levels of saturated fat and/or trans fat that contribute to high blood cholesterol.<sup>1</sup> To determine if a food is good for your heart, check the amount of total calories, saturated fats and trans fats in one serving. Make it a habit to read food labels before purchasing any food product.

## Trans fats raise LDL cholesterol and lower HDL cholesterol



Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol is known as “bad” cholesterol while high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol is known as “good” cholesterol.<sup>2</sup> You should aim for low LDL cholesterol and high HDL cholesterol.

*Trans* fat is usually formed through an industrial process that adds hydrogen to vegetable oil, turning it into partially hydrogenated oil. This process causes the oil to become solid at room temperature and less likely to spoil, allowing the food products to have a longer shelf life.<sup>3</sup> *Trans* fats tend to raise your LDL cholesterol and lower your HDL cholesterol.

Trans fat is commonly found in these food products<sup>3</sup>:

- Baked foods: cakes, cookies, and crackers
- Snacks/chips: potato chips, corn and tortilla chips
- Fried foods: fried chicken and french fries
- Refrigerator dough: frozen pizza crusts, pie crusts and cinnamon rolls
- Creamer and margarine: non-dairy coffee creamer and stick margarines

## Can cholesterol be too low?



Yes, but low cholesterol is not as common as high cholesterol. High cholesterol is strongly associated with heart attack and stroke. Although low cholesterol is usually better than high cholesterol, doctors are still trying to find out more about relations between low cholesterol and health risks.<sup>4</sup>

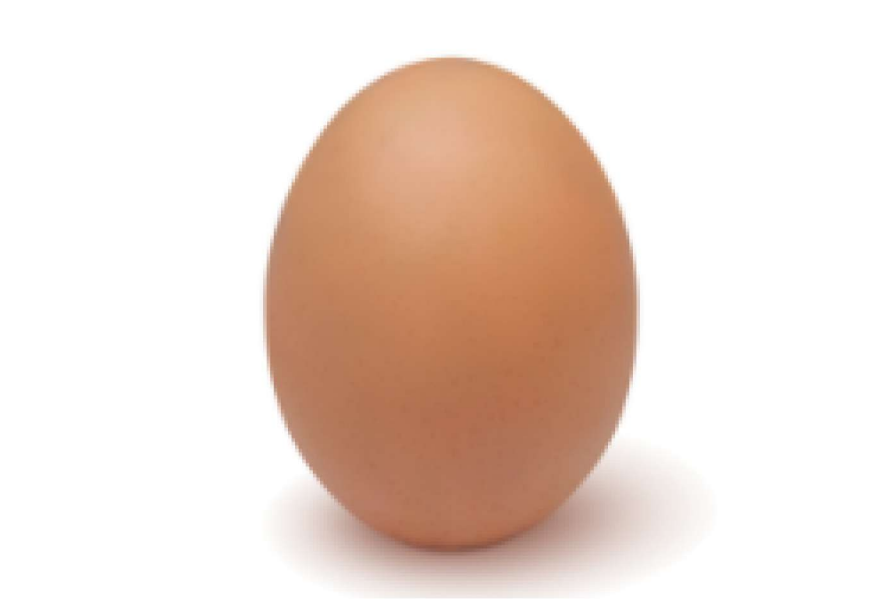
If you’re concerned about having low cholesterol, please consult your doctor.

## Blood cholesterol should be tested early



Poor dietary habits, lack of exercise, hereditary factors, smoking and alcohol consumption can all affect an individual’s cholesterol levels. You should start getting your blood cholesterol tested at the age of 20. Children can sometimes have high cholesterol too.<sup>1</sup> The lipid profile that checks low-density lipoprotein, high-density lipoprotein and triglyceride levels can help assess the risk for a heart attack or stroke. Your doctor will then advise you on the treatment options to lower your blood cholesterol if necessary.

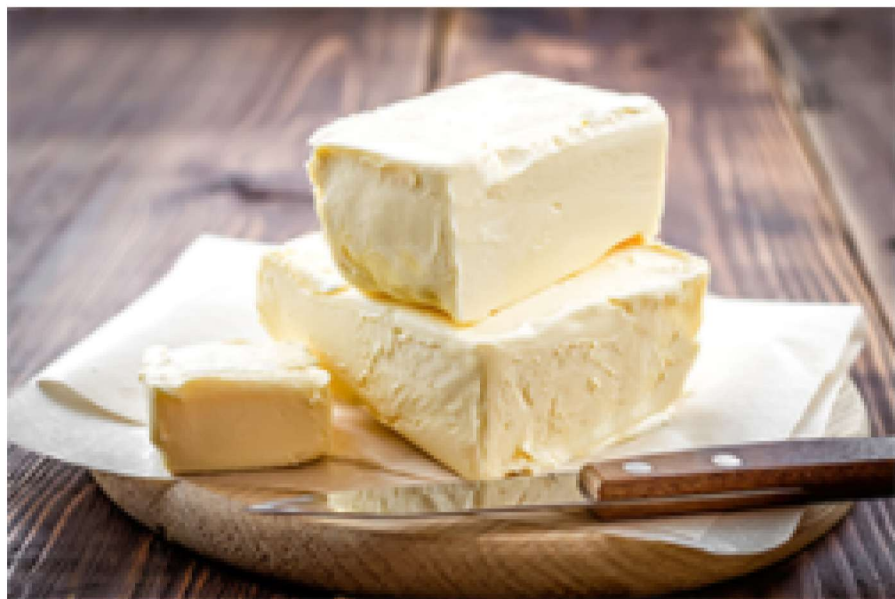
## Are eggs good or bad for me?



Eggs are generally good for health and should be part of a balanced diet. They are a good source of protein, vitamins (vitamin A, B<sub>2</sub>, B<sub>12</sub> and D) and minerals (folate and iodine).<sup>5</sup> A single medium-sized egg contains 186 mg of cholesterol, which is 62% of the recommended daily intake.<sup>6</sup>

There is no recommended limit on how many eggs you should eat per day. Studies have shown that consuming one egg a day is not associated with increased risk of heart disease or stroke.<sup>7,8</sup> It is good to cook them without adding salt or oil (hard-boiled, poached or scrambled without butter is preferred). Frying eggs can increase the fat content by around 50%.<sup>5</sup> However, people with high cholesterol levels should be more cautious about their egg intake and follow their doctor’s advice.

## Butter vs margarine: Which is better?



Margarine in general is considered better than butter when it comes to heart health. Margarine is made from vegetable oils, so it contains “good” fats (polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats). In contrast, butter is made from animal fats, so it contains more saturated fats and trans fats. However, some margarines contain *trans* fats. The more solid the margarine is, the more trans fat it has. Thus, it is better to pick soft margarines than stick forms of margarines.<sup>9</sup> Read the nutrition label and check that there is no *trans* fat in the margarine. From a dietary perspective, limiting foods high in saturated fats and *trans* fats can help lower your low-density lipoprotein cholesterol.

## Thin people can have high cholesterol too



Everyone, whether thin or fat, can have high cholesterol. Even though overweight and obese people are at greater risk of having high cholesterol, thin people can have high cholesterol too.<sup>1</sup> Most people are not aware of how much saturated and *trans* fat they eat every day. No one can “eat anything they want” and stay heart-healthy. So, make sure you take measures to stay in good health by adopting healthy lifestyle habits and having your blood cholesterol levels checked regularly.

## References

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