My cholesterol is high, but I do not eat high cholesterol foods. Is there a food I can eat that will lower my cholesterol?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 15% of the adult population (20 years and over) in the United States reported having high cholesterol as of 2008. Why is cholesterol a significant health concern? It is a leading risk factor for heart disease, the number one cause of death in America, which in 2007 claimed the lives of over 600,000 people (1). But what is cholesterol? It’s a type of dietary fat with a waxy consistency that the human body needs to function normally. It occurs naturally in our bodies but is often found in food as well. It is used to make hormones, vitamin D, which helps absorb calcium, and bile salts, which help digest fat. There are two main types: the HDL or “good” and the LDL or “bad” cholesterol. HDL works to remove excess cholesterol from the blood, while LDL can build up in artery walls, restricting blood flow, and eventually leading to heart disease. Dietary cholesterol is found in foods that come from animals like meat, cheese, eggs, butter and milk. Oddly enough, studies show that cholesterol found in food is not responsible for raising cholesterol levels. What is then? There are multiple possibilities such as eating high amounts of saturated and trans fats, smoking, being overweight, and having a family history of high cholesterol (2). Unfortunately, there is no miracle food that can be eaten to lower cholesterol. However, exercising and eating a balanced diet that includes plenty of fruits and vegetables will make a significant contribution (4). It also helps to eat foods containing soluble fiber, such as oatmeal, which bind cholesterol and take it out of the body in feces. Other options include soy protein, from soy milk and tofu, and nuts, like walnuts, which can raise the “good” cholesterol (3).

References


By Jennifer Parker