

Fruits & Vegetables Best for Cholesterol



All fruits and vegetables have health benefits to offer. But some are especially good.

Among the best:

Avocados.

Although this is one of the few fruits high in fat, it's mainly monounsaturated fat. Several studies find that eating one avocado a day can lower your LDL as much 17 percent while raising your HDL. Try them in salads and sandwiches or mashed with a bit of lemon juice, onion, and chopped tomato as a topping for baked potatoes. Don't go overboard; one avocado has about 340 calories.

Garlic.

Garlic can lower cholesterol modestly as well as prevent blood from becoming sticky and forming dangerous clots. The compound most studies focus on, allicin, is the same one that gives garlic its distinctive odor. In one analysis of five trials in which participants received either garlic supplements or a placebo, the authors concluded that you could lower your total cholesterol about 9 percent with the equivalent of 1 1/2 to 3 cloves of garlic daily for two to six months.

You need to crush, chop, or otherwise bruise the cloves to release the allicin. For a sweet way to get your garlic, remove the loose paper covering from a head of garlic, cut off the tops of the garlic, drizzle olive oil on it, wrap in foil, and bake in a 350°F oven until soft, about an hour. Then squeeze the heads of the cooked garlic onto toasted bread and spread.

What if you don't like garlic, also known as the "stinking rose"? Can you get the same benefits from a garlic pill? Maybe, if you choose the right one. A study by ConsumerLab.com found that 7 of 14 garlic supplements tested contained less of the active ingredient (allicin) than researchers say is necessary for a therapeutic effect. Those doses include 3,600 to 5,400 milligrams of allicin, while the doses in the products tested ranged from 400 to 6,500 milligrams. Read the bottle label before buying.

Oranges.

Think of your morning orange juice as cholesterol medicine in a glass. After drinking three glasses of orange juice a day for four weeks, 25 participants in a Canadian trial increased their HDL levels 21 percent and lowered their LDL/HDL ratio 16 percent. Of course, if you're watching your calorie intake, three glasses of juice is a lot; you'll probably want to stick to a glass or two a day.

Prunes.

Prunes (dried plums) contain a special kind of soluble fiber called pectin, which forms a gel in your intestines that sops up cholesterol before it hits your bloodstream. Blend cooked prunes with water into a puree that can replace oils and fats in baking, add dried prunes to stews for a delicious sweetness, or chop and sprinkle over salads, yogurt, cottage cheese, or cereal.

Counting to Nine

Hearing you need to get nine or more servings of fruits and vegetables can be daunting. But consider the definitions of a serving (below) from the National Cancer Institute. All varieties of fruits and vegetables fresh, frozen, canned, dried, and 100 percent juice--count.

- One medium-size fruit (apple, orange, banana, pear).
- 1/2 cup of raw, cooked, canned, or frozen fruits or vegetables.
- 3/4 cup (6 ounces) of 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice.
- 1/2 cup of cut up fruit.
- 1/2 cup of cooked or canned legumes (beans, peas).
- 1 cup of raw, leafy vegetables (lettuce, spinach).
- 1/4 cup of dried fruit (raisins, apricots, mango).

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