

Managing your cholesterol with food and herbs

High cholesterol, the penance for many who love meat and, unfortunately, some who don't!

In traditional Chinese medicine, high cholesterol is seen as an excess deposit of damp phlegm in the blood vessels and can be effectively managed with herbs and diet changes. **Cholesterol basics** Cholesterol is a waxy substance made in the liver and other cells. It is found in certain foods such as dairy products, eggs and meat. The body needs some cholesterol to function properly. Cell walls, or membranes, need cholesterol in order to produce hormones, vitamin D, and the bile acids that help to digest fat. When too much is present, health problems such as heart disease may develop.

Plaque deposits may form in the body's arteries, narrowing the space for oxygen-carrying blood to flow to the heart. Over time, this build-up causes atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) which can lead to heart disease. If the blood supply to a portion of the heart is completely cut off, the result is a heart attack. As always, it is better to prevent high cholesterol before it becomes a problem. The following recommendations are useful in a cholesterol reduction or prevention programme.

Nutrition Increase daily intake of cholesterol-lowering foods such as: Cold/deep water fish: Sardine, salmon, mackerel, tuna, herring Whole grains: Oats, rice (preferably brown), corn, wheatgrass, bran Nuts and seeds: Almond, flaxseed, pumpkin seed, walnut. Legumes: Most beans and peas. Vegetables and fruits: Banana, peach, cabbage, mint leaf, broccoli, parsley, bell pepper, tomato, carrot, celery, cucumber, mushroom. Eat from the onion family (garlic, onion, scallion). Olive oil contains a potent mix of antioxidants that can lower your 'bad' (LDL) cholesterol but leave your 'good' (HDL) cholesterol untouched. All of the foods listed above have one or more of the following nutrients: lecithin, vitamin C, vitamin E, niacin and omega-3 oils, and help to cleanse and rebuild the arteries and heart. They may also be taken as supplements in some cases.

Decrease the intake of foods such as: Cheese Tobacco Cured meats Sugars Greasy or fried foods Alcohol Red meat Herbal preparations Herbal preparations as recommended by a trained herbal practitioner to increase coronary circulation, lower triglycerides and cholesterol, often include herbs such as: Ze xie (Rhizoma alismatis). Shan zha (Fructus crataegis/hawthorn fruit). Jiao gu lan (Rhizoma seu herba gynostemmatidis). Zi mu xu (Herba medicago sativa).

Lifestyle recommendations Being overweight can increase your cholesterol. Exercise is one of the best ways to decrease the build-up of cholesterol in the arteries and lose weight. A diet based on whole grains and vegetables in conjunction with mild daily exercise can significantly improve vascular health in a few weeks. Drink tea daily, especially after meals, to facilitate the elimination of fatty foods from the diet. Beneficial teas include black, oolong or green tea. Dr Tracey-Ann Brown is an oriental medicine practitioner, herbalist and doctor of acupuncture. Email: yourhealth@gleanerjm.com.