

Ask The Dietitian

The Lowdown On Cholesterol Reduction

by Steven Yannicelli, Ph.D.
(NAPSA)—My doctor told me I have high cholesterol. What should I do?



Steven Yannicelli, Ph.D.,
registered dietitian

If you have trouble managing your cholesterol, you are not alone. One in three Americans—more than 100 million—struggle with cholesterol and are at risk for heart attacks and strokes. The first step should be to talk to a registered dietitian or other health care professional to develop a lifestyle plan that's right for you.

I often recommend people start the Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLC) program that was created by the U.S. government under the National Institutes of Health National Cholesterol Education Program. TLC includes regular physical activity (30 minutes a day, three to four times a week), weight management and suggests Americans increase their daily intake of certain plant-based ingredients called sterols and stanols to 2 grams per day. Research shows plant sterols and stanols reduce cholesterol.

Are there over-the-counter products that help reduce cholesterol?

Yes. The most popular and most widely studied products are plant sterol and stanol-based. The U.S. government recommends people consume 2 grams of plant sterols a day as part of its Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes program.

Plant sterols and stanols work by blocking absorption of LDL or "bad" cholesterol and removing it from the body. They are found naturally in wood pulp, nuts, corn and rice, but only in trace amounts.

Fortunately, specialty margarines and salad dressings made with these ingredients are readily available at most drug and grocery stores. And Minute Maid recently introduced a specialty orange juice with plant sterols and stanols.

However, these options add unnecessary calories and fat to your diet, so I often recommend a plant sterol and stanol dietary supplement called Cholest-Off. Cholest-Off provides 1.8 grams of plant sterols and stanols in a convenient, easy-to-swallow tablet, and clinical trials show it can reduce LDL cholesterol by up to 24 percent when taken with a low-fat diet.

I take prescription statins to lower my cholesterol. Can I also take natural products to lower my cholesterol?

The National Institutes of Health National Cholesterol Education Program's Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLC) plan recommends that people consume 2 grams of plant sterols and stanols daily, and more than 50 years of research supports this recommendation. If you are already on prescription statins you can safely add plant sterol and stanol products.

However, since statins often have negative side effects, it may be beneficial to first consider a natural cholesterol reduction program such as TLC. Taking a plant sterol and stanol supplement is an easy way to incorporate the TLC recommended amounts of plant sterols and stanols. I like Cholest-Off, a plant sterol and stanol supplement that provides 1.8 grams of plant sterols and stanols per day. Talk to your health care professional about natural options to lower your cholesterol.

Steven Yannicelli is a Ph.D. and registered dietitian. If you have questions about cholesterol reduction or other health concerns, please contact him at Nature Made.com or call 1-800-276-2878.