

## Ayurveda - Health notes

### Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a fatty acid that is manufactured in the liver. The body needs cholesterol to build cell membranes, vitamin D, hormones, and bile acids.

From the ayurvedic perspective, the body also needs cholesterol for supporting and lubricating the body's channels, known as shrotas. Millions of micro-shrotas carry nutrients to the cells and waste from the cells. Other shrotas are larger, such as the arteries and veins that carry blood to and from the heart. To keep the shrotas flexible, elastic and functional, they must be constantly lubricated with cholesterol, which your body manufactures from healthy fats. This is especially true of the delicate pranavahi shrotas that lead to the brain and the shrotas that carry hot fluids such as blood.

### What is "bad" cholesterol?

From the ayurvedic perspective, ama, or toxins in the fat tissue, cause the harmful kind of cholesterol. Simple ama, the sticky, foul-smelling waste product of improper digestion, can block the channels of the body, such as the arteries.

Amavisha is a more reactive, dangerous type of ama. Amavisha is created when ama is present for a very long time and is not flushed from the system. When ama starts to spread throughout the body, it can mix with the dhatus (body tissues) and the malas (waste products). Once amavisha mixes with the fat tissue, it damages the channels of the body and leads to problems such as high cholesterol, heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure.

### Dietary tips to balance cholesterol

Follow a Kapha-pacifying diet to help enhance fat metabolism. Favor bitter, astringent and pungent foods. Astringent foods include most pulses or dried beans, such as lentils, split mung dhal, and garbanzo beans. Stay away from the larger beans, but favor the smaller, split kind. Astringent tastes also includes many vegetables, such as the cruciferous family (broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower) and fruits such as apples and pears. Bitter foods include greens such as spinach, chard, kale and mustard greens. These greens, when cooked and seasoned with spices, help cleanse the bowel and thus prevent the bad type of cholesterol from accumulating in the body

The Kapha-pacifying diet also includes many healthy grains. Barley is karshana, which means that it enhances fat metabolism. Oats provide needed fiber, as long as it is whole oats, not processed oats. Quinoa provides zinc, which enhances fat metabolism. Amaranth is also recommended.

Avoid sweet, sour and salty foods. Sweet foods include not just sugar but also rice, wheat, pasta, breads, and sweet milk products. Sour foods include not only lemons and other sour fruits, but yogurt, cheese, tomatoes and vinegar, which is found in salad dressings, ketchup, mustard and pickles. Even though yogurt is difficult to digest and clogs the channels because it is heavy and sour, a yogurt drink called digestive lassi is actually good for balancing cholesterol.

Always cook your food and eat it warm, because this helps counteract the cool, earthy Kapha dosha. Avoid bad fats (saturated fats and trans fats), and cook with small amounts of ghee or olive oil.

For flavoring your food, use this Cholesterol-Balancing Spice Mixture:

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### **Cholesterol Balancing Spice Mixture**

- \* 3 parts ground turmeric
- \* 6 parts ground cumin
- \* 6 parts ground coriander
- \* 6 parts ground fennel
- \* 2 parts ground fenugreek
- \* 1 part dried powdered ginger
- \* 1 part ground black pepper

Combine the spices and store in a sealed container. When preparing your meal, sauté a teaspoon of spices in a small amount of ghee or olive oil. Combine with vegetables or grains to give them a satisfying flavor and enhance digestion.

### **Herbs that Heal**

Cholesterol Protection from Maharishi Ayurveda is an herbal product that enhances liver function, generating more bile and decreasing the overall amount of cholesterol. But it goes beyond the simple increasing of bile by improving fat metabolism, thus reducing LDL or "bad" cholesterol in particular, and creating a healthier ratio of bad to good cholesterol. It strengthens liver function, enhances successful metabolism of food, and builds plasma, blood, muscle and fat tissue. It enhances the quality, quantity and metabolism of fats, helping break down fatty foods.

Finally, it flushes cholesterol from the eliminative tract. This is also a very important factor, because when the liver purifies out the toxins and bad cholesterol, it dumps them in the large colon to be eliminated by the body. If they stay there, due to a sluggish bowel function, they can still problems. So it's very important that the elimination system be strengthened to cleanse the bad cholesterol from the body.

There are five major herbs included in this formula to produce healthier cholesterol: Phyllanthus niruri, Guduchi (Indian Tinospora), Indian Sarsaparilla, Parijat (Night Jasmine), and Manjistha. Each of these helps with bile secretion and also purifies blood and muscle tissue, thus purifying the building blocks for healthy fat tissue.

In addition, Guduchi strengthens all of the dhatu agnis, including the meda dhatu agni, which is responsible for fat metabolism. Guduchi supports the intellectual stamina of the body to enhance the quality of fat for the entire body. Another way to say this is that it supports the production of ojas, which is the master coordinator between consciousness, the doshas, tissues and metabolism for the whole body--including fat tissue and fat metabolism.

Guggul increases fat metabolism. Shilajit enhances metabolism and prevents nutrients from being lost in the metabolic process. Manjistha and Indian Sarsaparilla help bring balance to the interaction between the liver (governed by Ranjaka Pitta) and blood plasma, thus creating purer blood by screening out toxins. Parijat helps cool the body and eliminate excess heat, thus preventing the formation of amavisha. It is also good for the joints and nerves.

Other ingredients also have a profound effect in supporting healthy cholesterol levels.

Turmeric supports the liver, purifies the blood, increases bile and enhances the interaction of plasma and blood. Trikatu, which is a combination of powdered Ginger, Long Pepper and Black Pepper, enhances absorption and thus makes the other herbs in the formula easier to assimilate. Licorice balances all three doshas and especially helps cool Pitta dosha,

assimilate. Licorice balances all three doshas and especially helps cool Pitta dosha, decreasing the reactivity of amavisha. It also increases bioavailability of the other ingredients in the formula.

Digest Plua which includes Haritaki, Amalaki, and Bibhitaki, helps scrub the colon and remove cholesterol from the body through the bowel. Finally, zinc (Yasad Bhasma) increases fat metabolism.

Many of these traditionally known herbs have been examined in modern research studies. In a double-blind study published in Science, Guggul was shown to reduce cholesterol as much as cholesterol-lowering drugs, but without the harmful side effects. Turmeric was found to lower triglycerides and serum cholesterol. Phyllanthus niruri significantly lowered serum lipid levels and protected the liver from toxins. Zinc was found to reduce atherosclerosis.

### **Lifestyle tips to balance cholesterol**

Follow a Kapha-pacifying routine. This includes exercising every single day. Exercise balances all the agnis and improves circulation. Yoga asanas and surya namaskara (sun salutes) are part of the ayurvedic routine and can be performed twice daily for ten minutes each. Pranayama, or yogic breathing exercises, are also recommended, as proper breathing helps digestion and helps clean the shrotas, or channels.

To keep cholesterol in balance, it's also important to do some kind of aerobic exercise in addition to yoga and sun salutes for at least half an hour every day. You can start with brisk walking, which is sufficient for many people. But if you feel the need for more vigorous exercise, you can swim, cross-country ski, kayak, take an aerobics class, or play sports. The important thing is to exert to only fifty percent of your capacity, and to gradually increase your endurance by exercising every day.

The Kapha pacifying routine also discourages sleeping during the day, as day-sleep causes the metabolism to slow and the shrotas or channels to fill with ama. Wake up before six o'clock, and avoid daytime naps.

Eat your meals at the same time every day, and plan to eat your largest meal at lunchtime, when your digestion is strong. To avoid indigestion at night, eat lightly.

Finally, one of the most effective ways to lower cholesterol is to practice the Transcendental Meditation® technique. The American Heart Association has recently published a study in its journal Stroke that showed that the simple practice of Transcendental Meditation lowered cholesterol and the threat of stroke as much as cholesterol-lowering drugs--but without the dangerous side effects. Practicing the TM® technique, which takes only twenty minutes twice a day, has another advantage--it reduces stress and improves mental clarity, making it easier to follow a healthy diet and make healthy lifestyle choices the rest of the day.