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Superfoods! Diet Suggestions from Top Dietitians

Nutrition Experts Provide Helpful Tips for Low-Cholesterol Diets

By [Ellen Slotkin, RD, LDN](#), About.com Contributing Writer Updated August 17, 2010

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You may have heard of [superfoods](#) -- diet additions that pack a wallop in terms of their ability to help keep you healthy. Here, several of America's top nutrition experts provide you with their picks for superfoods worth your munching to lower your cholesterol.



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1. **GROUND FLAXSEED**

Recommended by: Dr. Janet Bond Brill, PhD, RD, LDN -- author of *Cholesterol DOWN: 10 Simple Steps to Lower Your Cholesterol in 4 Weeks--Without Prescription Drugs* (Crown/Three Rivers, 2006)

According to Dr. Brill, "Flaxseeds are a three-part package when it comes to promoting heart health. They are a virtual storage vat of polyunsaturated omega-3 essential fatty acids. Flaxseeds are the richest plant source of this fatty acid, which is not very plentiful in the American food supply."

More reasons to love this food?

- Contains a huge supply of lignan, a type of phytoestrogen that exerts powerful antioxidant effects which inhibit the process of plaque-build-up or [atherosclerosis](#).
- Twenty-five percent of the fiber in flaxseeds is soluble (a large amount). This type of fiber soaks up bile acids in the intestine so that you excrete them. This results in a greater rate of cholesterol excretion from the body, hence a dramatic lowering of LDL or "bad" cholesterol."

Dr. Brill recommends that individuals eat two tablespoons of ground flaxseeds every day. This provides 3 grams of [ALA](#)--the plant version of super heart-healthy omega-3 fat.

How to Eat: Brill suggests that you try adding some flaxseeds to your favorite baked goods. "Simply replace each tablespoon of oil or shortening in your recipe with 3 tablespoons of ground flaxseeds. The flax will add heart-healthy nutrients, and the natural omega-3 fat will help you create rich and delicious baked goods that hold their moisture."

2. **NUTS**

Recommended by: Elisa Zied, MS, RD, CDN -- founder/president Zied Health Communications, and author of *Nutrition At Your Fingertips* (Alpha Books/Penguin, 2009)

Zied knows that nuts can be a source of confusion for consumers. "Though they're high in calories and fat, many nuts are rich sources of healthful unsaturated fats (including monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats)," she says. When it comes to lowering your cholesterol, it's worth knowing the good options from the bad.

Consuming nuts favorably affects various risk factors for cardiovascular disease (CVD), including serum lipid levels.

Almonds and pistachios are particularly of help, although walnuts appear to be the standout in terms of potential beneficial impact on blood lipids. Three studies showed that consuming walnuts improved total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, and the ratio of "bad" [LDL](#) to "good" [HDL](#)."

Zied also reminds us that walnuts are rich in protein. They contain fiber and key minerals such as magnesium and phosphorus, as well. "Compared with other nuts, walnuts are particularly high in polyunsaturated fats and are a great source of alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), an omega-3 essential fatty acid (a type of polyunsaturated fat)," she says. More? You bet. "Walnuts are also rich in antioxidants, powerful chemicals that protect the body against free radicals (harmful contaminants within the body and in the environment that attack body cells and can promote disease)."

How to Eat: Zied suggests nuts as a quick, stand-alone snack. Munch on a small handful, or add them to low-fat yogurt, breakfast cereal, salad, or atop an entrée or side dish, like cooked vegetables. "The key is to include them in moderate portions," she says. "For most of us, that translates to about 1 or 1.5 ounces per day."

3. [OLIVE OIL](#)

Recommended by: Faye Berger Mitchell, RD -- nutritionist and speaker in Bethesda, Maryland; co-author of *Making Nutrition Your Business - Private Practice and Beyond* (Fall 2010)

This one may sound counterintuitive -- oil? On a heart-healthy diet? You bet, says Berger Mitchell.

"Olive oil is an excellent source of [monounsaturated fat](#), which studies show can help reduce LDL cholesterol levels," she says.

Preparation Tip: For a quick and easy flavoring, Berger Mitchell suggests making your own salad dressing using one part olive oil and one part balsamic vinegar. "Add some crushed garlic and toss on salads or cooked vegetables," she recommends.

4. [AVOCADO](#)

Recommended by: D. Milton Stokes MPH, RD, CDN -- co-author of *The Flat Belly Diet for Men* (Rodale, 2009).

In Mr. Stokes's experience, it's hard to find something that *doesn't* pair well with this favorite. "In our test panel of guys, they loved the avocado, too. Their favorite was a simple breakfast sandwich comprising of [eggs](#), reduced-fat cheddar, and avocado slices on whole grain English muffins. Simple, quick and delicious!"

Stokes promotes a philosophy of adding in healthy foods and notes that, "emerging research shows that monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs) help reduce visceral fat and we also know this type of fat promotes cardiovascular health."

Preparation Tip: Stokes suggests making the above breakfast sandwich and seasoning with Sunny Paris Spice Blend (from Penzey's Spices).

5. [BEANS](#)

Recommended by: Bonnie Taub-Dix, MA, RD, CDN -- author, *Read It Before You Eat It* (Plume, 2010)

According to Taub-Dix, beans are great-at-multi-tasking superfood that "help keep your heart happy."

Beans' rich soluble fiber content creates cholesterol-cutting power. As a bonus, "their antioxidants help decrease disease-promoting [inflammation](#), and their potassium content helps control blood pressure," she notes.

Preparation Tip: Taub-Dix recommends pureeing any bean and adding your favorite seasoning to create a dip for veggies in a flash. Haven't got the time to make your own? You'll find all sorts of varieties of hummus in a store near you. "Many consumers don't realize [hummus](#) is made from heart-healthy chickpeas," she says.

Sources:

Personal Interview: Bonnie Taub-Dix, 7/28/10

Personal Interview: D. Milton Stokes, 7/28/10

Personal Interview: Elisa Zied, 7/28/10

Personal Interview: Faye Berger Mitchell, 7/28/10

Personal Interview: Dr. Janet Brill, 7/28/10

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