

TLC Diet

The aim: Cutting high cholesterol

The claim: You will lower your “bad” LDL cholesterol by 8 to 10 percent in six weeks.

The theory: Created by National Institute of Health’s National Cholesterol Education Program, the Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes Diet (TLC) is endorsed by the American Heart Association as a heart-healthy regimen that can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease. The key is cutting back sharply on fat, particularly saturated fat. Saturated fat (think fatty meat, whole-milk dairy and fried foods) bumps up bad cholesterol, which increases the risk of heart attack and stroke. That, along with strictly limiting daily dietary cholesterol intake and getting more fiber, can help people manage high cholesterol, often without medication.

How does the TLC Diet work? Begin by choosing your target calorie level. If your only concern is lowering LDL, the goal is 2,500 per day for men and 1,800 for women. Need to shed pounds, too? Aim for 1,600 (men) or 1,200 (women). Then cut saturated fat to less than 7 percent of daily calories, which means eating less high-fat dairy, like butter, and ditching fatty meats like salami. Consume no more than 200 milligrams of dietary cholesterol a day – the amount in about 2 ounces of cheese. If after six weeks your LDL cholesterol hasn’t dropped by about 8 to 10, add in 2 grams of plant stanols or sterols and 10 to 25 grams of soluble fiber each day. (Soluble fiber and plant stanols and sterols help block the absorption of cholesterol from the digestive tract, which helps lower LDL. Stanols and sterols are found in vegetable oils and certain types of margarine, and are available as supplements, too.) On TLC, you’ll be eating lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat, or nonfat dairy products, fish and skin-off poultry, exactly how you meet these guidelines is up to you, though sample meal plans are available.

Do’s and Don’ts

Do: Stick to skinless poultry.

That’s true be it chicken or turkey; Red meat is strongly discouraged, since it’s often high in saturated fat.

Will you lose weight? Unclear, since the TLC diet was designed to improve cholesterol levels, not for weight loss. However, research suggest that in general, low-fat diets tend to promote weight loss.

Does it have cardiovascular benefits? Yes. It reflects the medical community’s widely accepted definition of heart-healthy diet. An eating pattern heavy on fruits, veggies, and whole grains but light on saturated fat and salt is considered the best way to keep cholesterol and blood pressure in check and heart disease at bay.

Can it prevent or control diabetes? Little research has examined TLC’s effect on diabetes, but the Journal of Atherosclerosis and Thrombosis study mentioned above found TLC significantly lowered the fasting insulin levels of participants with high cholesterol. That’s important because elevated insulin levels can predict whether someone will develop Type 2 diabetes. (The normal-cholesterol group didn’t appreciably change their fasting insulin levels). In general, most experts consider an eating pattern like the one promoted by TLC to be the gold standard of diabetes prevention – It emphasizes the right foods and discourages the wrong ones.

Are there health risks? No indications of serious risks or side effects have surfaced. The diet’s eating pattern is also safe for children and teens.

How well does I conform to accepted dietary guidelines?

- **Fat.** The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans advise that only 20-35% of daily calories come from fat. Thanks to it’s emphasis on fruits, veggies, lean meat, and low-fat dairy, TLC keeps you on target.
- **Protein:** The TLC diet provides about 15% of daily calories from protein. That’s within the recommend 10-35%
- **Carbohydrates.** It’s within the acceptable range for carb consumption.
- **Salt.** The 2010 Dietary Guidelines call for a daily maximum of 2,300 milligrams of sodium or 1,500 milligrams for those 51 and older or African-Americans, and those with hypertension, diabetes or chronic kidney disease. The TLC diet keep you at or below 2,300mg daily.
- **Other key nutrients:** The 2010 Dietary Guidelines call these “nutrients of concern” because many Americans get too little of one or more of them.
- **Fiber:** Getting your recommended amount – between 22 grams and 34 grams for adults – helps you feel full and promotes good digestions. Veggies, fruits, beans, and whole grains are major sources, and they’re encouraged on TLC. Most daily menus provide roughly 40 to 50 grams.
- **Potassium:** A sufficient amount of this important nutrient, according to the 2010 Dietary Guidelines, counters salt’s ability to raise blood pressure, decreases bone loss and reduces the risk of developing kidney stones. It’s not that easy to get the recommended daily 4,700mg from food. Bananas are high in potassium, yet you would still need to eat 11 a day. Most Americans take in far too little. How much you get on the TLC diet is entirely up to you, but because you’re almost certainly eating more fruits and veggies than you were before, you’ll likely get more potassium than most.
- **Calcium:** This mineral is essential not only to build and maintain bones but to make blood vessels and muscles function properly. Many Americans do get enough. Women and anyone older than 50 should try especially hard to meet the government’s recommend

of 1,000mg to 1,300mg. You should be able to succeed with low-fat dairy products and calcium juices and cereals – or if necessary, a supplement.

- **Vitamin B-12:** Adults should shoot for 2.4 micrograms of this nutrients, which is critical to proper cell metabolism. Eating yogurt- a good source of this vitamin- will help you meet the recommendation.
- **Vitamin D:** Adults who don't get enough sunlight need to meet the governments 15 microgram recommendation with food or a supplements to lower the risk of bone fractures. Low-fat dairy will help you get the recommended amount, and eating just 3 ounces of sockeye salmon, which packs about 20 micrograms of vitamin D, will satisfy the requirement.

Supplement recommended? Although the TLC diet is nutritionally sound, an NCEP dietician say a multivitamin is a good insurance policy.

How easy it to follow? Depends on your knack for tracking what you eat. It is up to you, for example, to ensure that no more than 7 percent of your daily calories come from saturated fat, and that you don't exceed 200 mg of daily cholesterol from food.

Convenience: That TLC diet takes work and a certain aptitude for reading nutrition labels. Aside from an 80 page manual available online - Your Guide to Lowering Your Cholesterol with TLC- there are few resources to help you along.

Fullness: Nutrition experts emphasize the importance to satiety, the satisfied feeling that you've had enough. Hunger shouldn't be a problem on the TLC diet. You'll be eating lots of fiber-packed fruits and vegetables, which will quell hunger.

Taste: How much will you miss butter, fast food, and creamy sauce? If you like your food greasy or have a sweet tooth, the TLC diet may not make you salivate. But a little lemon and spices can make a seemingly bland chicken breast delicious. For dessert, non-fat frozen yogurt, low-fat sorbet, and popsicles are all allowed.

How Much Does it Cost? Other than the grocery bill, which should be no higher than usual, there are no expenses.

Does the diet allow for restrictions and preferences? Most people can customize the TLC diet to their needs including vegetarian, vegan, gluten free, low salt, Kosher, and Halal.

What is the role of exercise? The program calls for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise like brisk walking most days of the week. Being physically active lowers your risk of Heart Disease and Diabetes, help keep weight off, and increases energy levels.