

# Improve Your Cholesterol IQ & give a Valentine to your Heart

by Julie Hunter

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States. While it has long been thought that cardiovascular disease primarily affects men, statistics show it to be much more prevalent in women than previously understood.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, experts estimate that one in every two women will die of heart disease or stroke, making an increased effort at prevention in women urgent and imperative.

Recent research has discovered that the low-fat, low-cholesterol diet theme of the past 20 years is not as effective as it needs to be in fighting cardiovascular disease. Current clinical trials are proving that diets that focus on the type of fat being consumed and the type of cholesterol in the bloodstream are producing a much healthier result.

Men and women alike have two types of cholesterol in the blood. Deemed "good"

cholesterol and "bad" cholesterol, both play roles in the body and are required for proper physical function.

Low-density lipoproteins (LDLs) carry cholesterol from the liver and circulate it throughout the body. It's been labeled "bad cholesterol" because if too much of it is in the blood, it can be deposited on the walls of the coronary arteries. This leads to plaque build-up and cardiovascular disease, which can result in blood clots, stroke and heart attack.

High-density lipoproteins (HDLs) take the cholesterol from the blood back to the liver, where it is processed for elimination for the body. High HDL levels will make it less likely for cholesterol to be deposited in the arteries. This has earned it the title "good cholesterol."

The new and improved fight against cardiovascular disease does not just call for the generic reduction of cholesterol as in decades past, but for specifically lowering the LDL cholesterol level while in turn raising the levels of HDL cholesterol.

The Harvard School

of Public Health, which specializes in research that addresses the most pressing health issues of the day — currently AIDS, cancer and heart disease — reports that one of the most important determinates of blood cholesterol levels is fat in the diet. Not just any fat, however, as was previously thought.

Like cholesterol, dietary fats have been divided into "good fats" and "bad fats." The good fats increase the HDL levels and improve the function of keeping the arteries free and clear, while other fats increase the LDL cholesterol levels, making the body more susceptible to arterial plaque build-up.

Christie Benton, RD, CD, is the Outpatient Dietician for Dixie Regional Medical Center, named one of the nation's 100 Top Hospitals for cardiovascular care by Thomson Healthcare. To help patients on the

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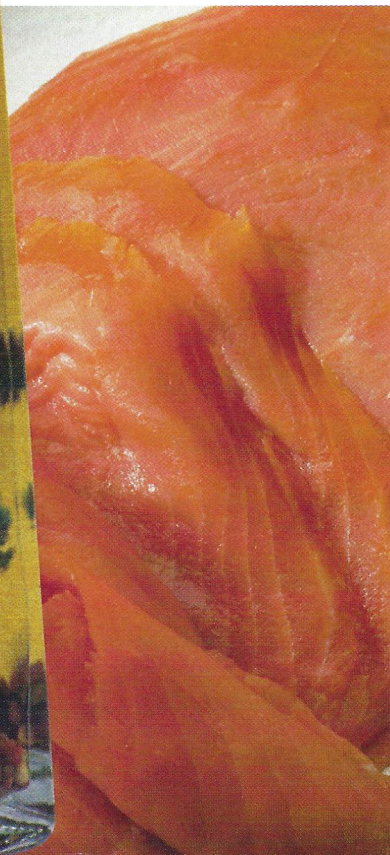
road to heart health, Benton advises them to stay away from saturated fats and trans-fatty acids, which are bad fats, and to embrace the good fats in monosaturated oils and omega-3 fatty acids.

To translate that into foods, Benton offers the following as sources of saturated fats: dairy fats such as sour cream, ice cream, butter and cheese; high-fat meats like pork spare ribs; and high-fat deserts such as cheesecake.

The phrase "partially hydrogenated" refers to a process applied to plant oils that make a certain types of chips, cookies, candy, snack cakes and crackers endure the length of time between manufacturing and eventual purchase and consumption. Anything that is partially hydrogenated contains trans fat and therefore does the heart no good.

The Harvard School of Public Health reports that some forms of margarine — specifically the hard stick margarine — are actually worse for the heart than butter because of high trans fat levels. Benton recommends tub-style margarine but advises consumers to check the label to ensure the product is trans fat free and that water or a monosaturated oil tops the list of ingredients.

Olive Oil and Salmon contain good fats.



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