

Wellness Beat

Advocate Health Center at Governors State University

September 2021



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Did you know that September is **National Cholesterol Education Month**? More than 93 million American adults have elevated cholesterol levels (CDC, 2020). Let's review a few dietary and lifestyle habits from the CDC (2020) that can help manage your cholesterol.

- **Eat low-fat and high-fiber food**

Choose foods low in saturated fat, sodium, and sugar.

- **Maintain a healthy weight**

Overweight/obesity levels raise levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol.

- **Aim for exercise 2-3 times a week**

Choose the stairs instead of the elevator, take walk breaks throughout the day.

- **Limit alcohol intake**

Excess alcohol intake can raise triglyceride levels, as both are processed in the liver.

- **No smoking**

Smoking damages and hardens the arteries, causing LDL cholesterol to "stick" and clog these vessels. This increases the risk of heart disease.

Following these tips can help to decrease your risk of high cholesterol. Schedule an annual examination with your health care provider to be aware of your risk.

Advocate Health Center at GSU

Flu vaccine will be available at the Health Center. Communications will be sent regarding when and how to schedule your shot. Stay tuned!

Can Chocolate Lower Your Risk of this Common Condition?

Has the pandemic got you buying – and henceforth eating – more chocolate than usual? According to a study in the European Journal of Preventative Cardiology, that may not entirely be a bad thing, at least for your heart health.

"In this study, it found that eating chocolate once a week could help keep the heart's blood vessels healthy, lowering your risk of coronary artery disease," explains April Jensen, nurse practitioner at Aurora Health Center in Menominee, MI. "Let's break it down a bit."

While chocolate is full of unhealthy sugar and fats, it also contains some heart-healthy nutrients:

- Flavonoids
- Polyphenols
- Stearic acid
- Methylxanthines

All of these things may help reduce inflammation, prevent blood clots and increase good cholesterol. In other words, it can be good for your heart.

"As with all things, be sure to keep moderation in mind," says Jensen. "While the study does not indicate how much chocolate may be good for you, it's safe to assume you should exercise caution when it comes to quantities. Eating a lot of chocolate adds extra calories, fat and sugar to your diet, which can result in obesity, diabetes and other chronic conditions."

Assuming you do not have allergies or conditions where eating chocolate could be harmful, and that you live a relatively healthy lifestyle, try opting for chocolate of the dark variety, since you have to eat a large quantity of milk chocolate to get the benefits of one bar of dark chocolate.

"A general rule of thumb is: The higher percentage of cocoa, the better," Jensen says.

Any time you're considering major changes to your diet, be sure to contact your doctor to make sure it is right for you.

Could this Common Ingredient Help Prevent Diabetes?

Not only is cinnamon a common ingredient, but a recent study found that it may also have health benefits for those at risk for Type 2 diabetes.

Cinnamon supplements were given to participants with prediabetes in the Journal of the Endocrine Society's study three times a day for 12 weeks. The 500 mg capsules helped the participants maintain a healthy blood sugar level. Participants also reported that carbohydrates were much easier for their bodies to process after taking the supplement as suggested.

"Cinnamon can help improve metabolic health by enhancing glucose uptake in skeletal muscles as well as increasing glycogen stores. Glycogen is the predominant source of energy and how the body stores carbohydrates for energy at the muscular level," says Dr. Tony Hampton, family medicine physician with Advocate Medical Group in Chicago.

One in every three adults in the United States have prediabetes, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Prediabetes is diagnosed when a person's blood sugar levels are higher than normal. When the high blood sugar levels progress, the person is diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes.

Dr. Hampton suggests the following to help reverse diabetes:

- **Intermittent fasting:** Under the guidance of a healthcare professional, this type of diet helps give the pancreas a break and time to heal from insulin production.
- **Consume fewer carbs:** Eating a diet consisting of low carbohydrates, such as less grains, sugar and starchy vegetables, help reduce the need for insulin production.
- **Reduce stress and increase sleep:** Chronic stress can often be triggered by lack of sleep. Elevated levels of stress can cause higher levels of not only insulin but also cortisol and inflammatory compounds.
- **Regular exercise:** Exercising one's muscles helps efficiently utilize glucose which helps balance blood sugar and insulin levels.

Further studies may confirm whether cinnamon has a long-term impact of preventing prediabetes patients from developing Type 2 diabetes.



Cantaloupe Smoothie Bowl

Water-packed frozen cantaloupe acts like ice cubes in your blender; the smaller the dice, the easier it will be on the blades. Make this a traditional, pourable smoothie by adding a touch more carrot juice or water before whizzing everything together.

Ingredients

Makes 2 servings

- 4 cups frozen cubed cantaloupe (1/2-inch pieces)
- ¾ cup carrot juice
- Pinch of salt
- Melon balls, berries, nuts and/or fresh basil for garnish

Preparation

Active Time 5m/Total Time 5m

1. Combine cantaloupe, juice and salt in a food processor or high-speed blender. Alternate between pulsing and blending, stopping to stir and scrape down the sides as needed, until thick and smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Serve the smoothie topped with more melon, berries, nuts and/or basil, if desired.



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