Cholesterol

What It Is
Cholesterol is a **waxy, fat-like substance found in all cells of the body**. Cholesterol is produced by the body (primarily by the liver) and is also consumed from food, referred to as “dietary cholesterol.”

The human body makes all the cholesterol that it needs, so it is not necessary to get cholesterol from food.

Where It Is Found
Dietary cholesterol is found **only in animal products**, including:
- Beef fat (tallow and suet), chicken fat, and pork fat (lard)
- Dairy products (such as milk, cheese, and yogurt)
- Egg yolks
- Meats and poultry
- Processed meat and poultry products (such as bacon, hot dogs, jerky, some luncheon meats, and sausages)
- Shellfish (such as lobster and shrimp)
- Spreads (such as butter, cream cheese, and sour cream)

What It Does
- Cholesterol is a structural component of cell membranes.
- Cholesterol is necessary for the production of bile, a fluid made by the liver that aids in the digestion of fat in the intestine.
- Cholesterol is used to make vitamin D and certain hormones, like estrogen and testosterone.
Cholesterol (produced by the body and consumed from food) circulates in the blood and is transported by particles called lipoproteins, which contain both lipid (fat) and protein. There are several types of lipoproteins, and how much you have of each of them is one of the many factors that determine your risk of cardiovascular disease.

- Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol is often referred to as “bad” cholesterol. It is the form in which cholesterol is carried from the liver to arteries and body tissues. Higher levels of LDL cholesterol in the blood can lead to a harmful buildup of cholesterol inside of artery walls. This buildup can increase the risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

- High-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol is often referred to as “good” cholesterol. It is the form in which cholesterol travels from body tissues back to the liver, where it is broken down and removed. Higher levels of HDL cholesterol in the blood can help prevent cholesterol buildup in arteries reducing the risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

The Daily Value for cholesterol is less than 300 mg per day.

- Compare and choose foods to get less than 100% DV of cholesterol each day. And remember:
  - 5% DV or less of cholesterol per serving is considered low
  - 20% DV or more of cholesterol per serving is considered high

- Try seafood and plant sources of protein (such as beans, peas, lentils, tofu and other soy products, and unsalted nuts and seeds) in place of some meats and poultry.

- Choose lean cuts of meats and poultry. Trim or drain fat from meat before or after cooking and remove poultry skin before eating.

- Substitute fat-free or 1% low-fat dairy products and/or lactose-free versions and fortified soy beverages for whole and 2% reduced-fat dairy products.

- More often cook and bake with liquid vegetable oils higher in polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fat (such as canola and olive oil) instead of fats high in saturated fat (such as butter, lard, shortening, and coconut oil).

- Opt for foods that do not contain cholesterol and saturated fat, such as beans, peas, lentils, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.