



Government of **Western Australia**  
Child and Adolescent Health Service



**Perth Children's Hospital**

# Getting to grips with Familial Hypercholesterolaemia (FH)

A guide for teenagers



# What is FH?

Having FH means your body makes too much cholesterol. This can stick to the insides of your blood vessels and damage them.

## Living with FH

FH is an inherited (genetic) condition that you are born with, where an altered gene causes high blood cholesterol.

Knowing how to live with FH means you can live a healthy and active life.



FH is a very common genetic condition. It affects 1 in every 250 people with 90% of those with the condition unaware they have it.

If you have siblings there is a 50 per cent chance they have also inherited the gene change causing FH. If you have children in the future, there is a 50 per cent chance of passing the gene change causing FH onto your children.

## How is it diagnosed?

FH is relatively easy to diagnose and identifying it at a young age is really important.

Treatment is more effective when started early, before high levels of cholesterol can cause damage to your blood vessels.

your **DOCTOR** may  
**SUSPECT FH** if:  
you have

- ☒ your cholesterol is very high
- ☒ other family members have been diagnosed with FH
- ☒ there is a history of early heart disease in close family members.

## TYPES OF CHOLESTEROL

**LDL = BAD CHOLESTEROL**

LOW DENSITY LIPOPROTEIN

Excess LDL cholesterol accumulates in the heart's arteries, raising the chance of heart attack or stroke.

**HDL = GOOD CHOLESTEROL**

HIGH DENSITY LIPOPROTEIN

HDL cholesterol helps remove the bad cholesterol (LDL) from the blood stream.

HOW IS IT  
TESTED?

A blood test will reveal  
your levels of

**“BAD”** and  
**“GOOD”**

cholesterol.

TOP TIPS

CHECK OUT OUR  
**TOP TIPS**  
FOR REDUCING YOUR  
**BAD** CHOLESTEROL...

# Tip 1: TAKE YOUR MEDICINES

Medicines (lipid lowering therapies including statins) help control your total cholesterol level and reduce your bad cholesterol.



Statins help your body filter cholesterol out of your blood and are highly effective at lowering LDL cholesterol.

Statins are very safe and are well tolerated in children and adolescents with FH. They should be taken consistently, once every day, to achieve optimal results.

## How long should you take them?

Taking statins is for life. Stopping your medication will cause your cholesterol to return to a high level within a few weeks.

If you miss a dose, taking more the next time is not recommended. Instead, take your usual dosage the following day.



## Tip 2: Heart healthy eating

1. Choosing to eat healthily is about making small gradual changes such as swapping those not so healthy foods with new healthy ones.
2. Eating a heart healthy diet is important for reducing additional risk factors.
3. With FH it is unlikely that diet alone will significantly reduce LDL cholesterol levels.
4. Maintaining a healthy diet and eating the right foods on a regular basis is what matters.





## Choose MORE...

- ☒ fruits and vegetables
- ☒ nuts, seeds and plain popcorn
- ☒ water
- ☒ low-fat yoghurt, milk and cheese
- ☒ vegetable spreads and olive oil
- ☒ lean meat, fish and beans
- ☒ skinless chicken and turkey
- ☒ wholegrain/wholemeal bread
- ☒ muesli or porridge
- ☒ brown rice and pasta
- ☒ plant sterol enriched/heart smart margarine spread

## Choose LESS...

- ☒ sugary drinks
- ☒ chips and deep fried foods
- ☒ lollies, pretzels and chocolate
- ☒ pastry, biscuits and cakes
- ☒ full fat yoghurt, milk and cheese
- ☒ butter and coconut oil
- ☒ sausages, burgers and fatty meat
- ☒ take aways or fast food
- ☒ sugary breakfast cereals
- ☒ pastry, biscuits and cakes

### Plant sterols

- Plant sterols are found naturally in plant foods in very small quantities
- Consumption of 2-3g/day plant sterols has been shown to reduce LDL blood cholesterol levels by 10-12%. There is no additional benefit observed from having plant sterols at higher amounts (>3g/day).
- In Australia, margarine spread, milk, yoghurt and cereals can be fortified with plant sterols. This provides a convenient way to achieve this higher dose.
- It is NOT recommended to consume additional plant sterols for children under 2 years of age, pregnant, or breastfeeding women who are not under close medical supervision, as plant sterols have not been studied in these groups.

# Understanding CHOLESTEROL

The majority of cholesterol in your body is made naturally and is circulated in the bloodstream.

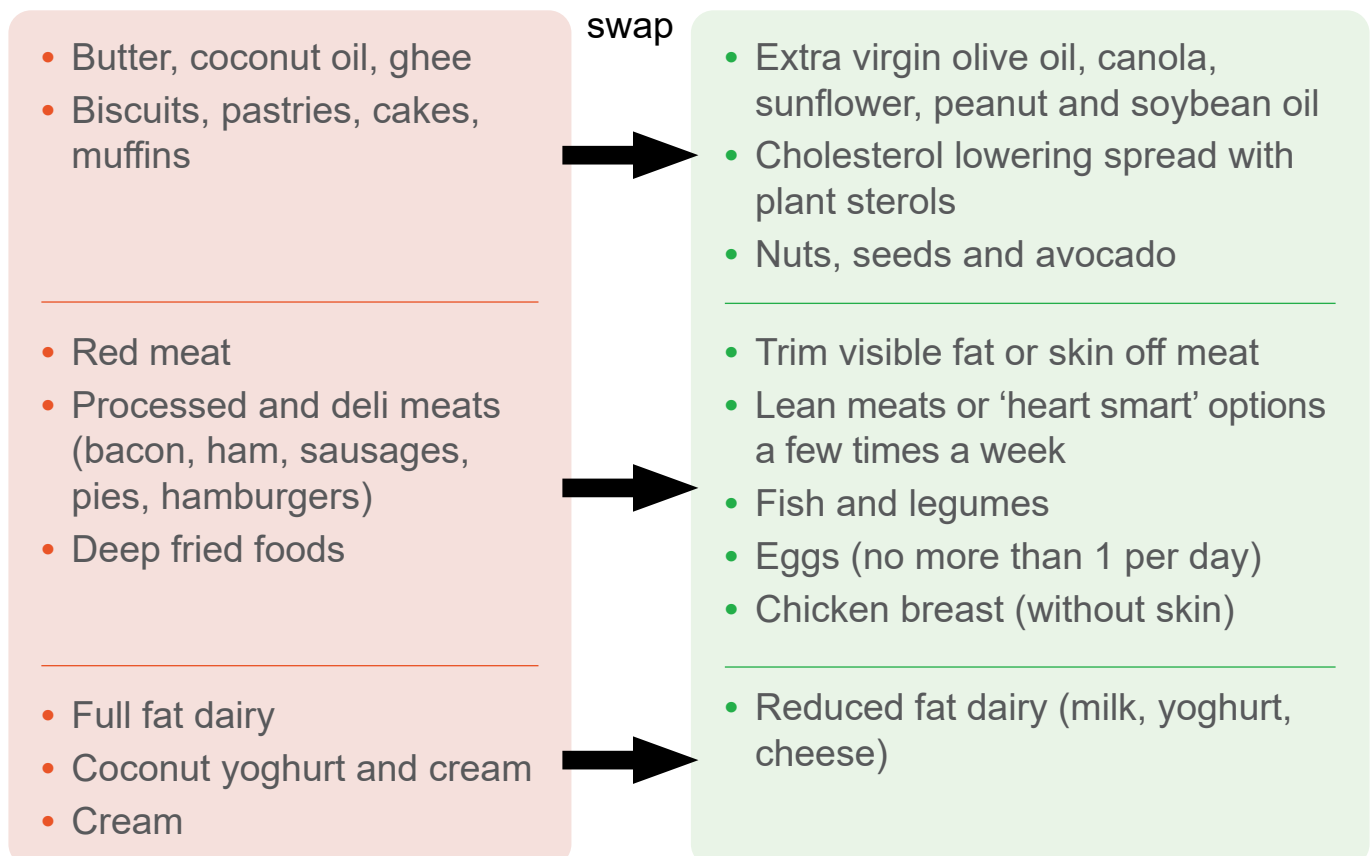
You also get some cholesterol from food but this doesn't really impact your blood cholesterol. The types of fat in your diet have a bigger impact.

Cholesterol is really important to keep our bodies working properly, but too much of the bad cholesterol (LDL) can be unhealthy and may lead to heart problems as we get older.

## Eat less saturated fat

Saturated and trans fats in fatty foods and animal foods increases the bad LDL cholesterol. Replacing this with unsaturated fats from plants and fish decreases LDL cholesterol and increases the good HDL cholesterol.

Plant sterols can further reduce your LDL cholesterol and can be found in margarine spreads, milk and cereals with plants sterols added. Aim for 2-3g per day.





# Tip 3: **STAY ACTIVE**

Choose activities you enjoy to increase the chances of doing it more often. Being physically active benefits every part of the body, including the mind.



# Staying **ACTIVE** can help you...



☒ INCREASE YOUR GOOD (HOLESTEROL

☒ LOOK AND FEEL GREAT



☒ INCREASE YOUR MUSCLE STRENGTH

☒ BOOST YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM

☒ SLEEP WELL



## Tip 4: Don't smoke or vape

Smoking or vaping damages healthy blood vessels.

Smoking or vaping increases your risk of heart disease. Your risk is much greater if you have FH.



## Tip 5: Avoid alcohol



LET'S RECAP!

IF YOU HAVE **FH** YOU CAN STAY  
**FIT** AND **HEALTHY** BY...



**1. TAKING YOUR MEDICINES**



**2. HEART HEALTHY EATING**



**3. STAYING ACTIVE**



**4. NOT SMOKING OR VAPING**



**5. AVOIDING ALCOHOL**

## More information

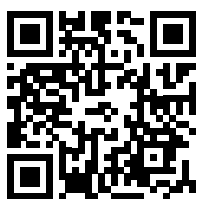
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For more information or to talk to someone with FH, reach out to **FH Australia**. **Scan the QR to visit the FH Australia website** or email [info@fhaustralia.org.au](mailto:info@fhaustralia.org.au)

## Acknowledgement

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