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An apple a day couldn't hurt

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By Jessica Belasco - Express-News

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It seems that the old aphorism is true: An apple a day can actually keep the doctor away.

Make that an apple, beans, almonds and a handful of other foods known to lower levels of LDL cholesterol (the bad kind).

In fact, incorporating these foods into your daily diet (along with some exercise) can be so effective that cholesterol-lowering drugs may not be necessary.

"We tell our patients, 'Try a healthy lifestyle before medication,'" says Dr. Landon Wellford, a cardiologist at the Heart and Vascular Institute of Texas.

You'll get the most benefit if you eat the cholesterol-lowering foods daily as part of a diet low in saturated fats, says Janet Brill, author of *Cholesterol Down: 10 Simple Steps to Lower Your Cholesterol in 4 Weeks — Without Prescription Drugs* (Crown/Three Rivers, \$13.95).

And since they all work in slightly different ways, it's best to stock your kitchen with as many of them as possible.

Here's a grocery list of cholesterol-fighting super foods:

Plant sterols Found in small amounts in plant foods, plant sterols are being added in larger amounts to a variety of other foods to block absorption of intestinal cholesterol.

Find it in foods containing CoroWise, such as Minute Maid Premium Heart Wise orange juice. It's also found in some margarines, yogurts and supplements.

As little as 0.8 grams of plant sterols daily has an effect on cholesterol, although maximum benefits comes at about two grams daily, says Rebecca Reeves, a registered dietitian and assistant professor at Baylor College of Medicine who is associated with CoroWise's manufacturer.

Whole grains Brill's favorite is oatmeal, which she eats for breakfast every morning.

"It's easy to do, it's inexpensive and it's delicious," she says.

Look for whole, not processed, oats, which provide the soluble fiber that targets cholesterol.

Apples

Munch an apple a day to benefit from soluble fiber in the form of pectin.

Sound boring? Experiment with eating different varieties of apples. They're all good for your heart.

Beans

Just a half cup of beans, loaded with fiber, can benefit your heart health.

Throw chickpeas on a salad for lunch, add a bowl of black beans as a side dish at dinner or add beans to soups.

Flaxseed Grind up some flaxseeds and throw it into your oatmeal, or drink it in water or juice.

Almonds or walnuts



File photo

Apples, as well as beans and almonds, are a cholesterol-fighting super food.

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Just a handful of these heart-healthy nuts can provide benefits.

Just made sure you eat them by the handful, not the bowlful, to avoid weight gain, Brill says.

And go for the natural or dry-roasted kinds over salted nuts or those covered in cinnamon and sugar.

Garlic

It can be difficult to incorporate a high enough concentration of garlic in daily cooking, Brill says, so consider taking a supplement.

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