Shellfish ? Cholesterol content? [1]

Dear Alice,

How much cholesterol does shellfish have?

Answer

Dear Reader,

We’ve all heard about the “good stuff” in seafood (and if you haven’t, check out the Health benefits of fish oils [2] in the Go Ask Alice! archives), but cholesterol [3] often gets less attention. Gram for gram, cholesterol levels in most shellfish are comparable to the levels in beef, pork, and poultry. But, unlike other meat, shellfish actually have low levels of saturated fat [4]. This is critical for heart disease prevention because too much saturated fat can increase your low-density lipoproteins (LDL) which, in higher amounts, can form plaque that hardens and narrows arteries over time. If you’re concerned about dietary cholesterol and its impact on your health, considering looking at Unscrambling conflicting info about eggs [5] in the Go Ask Alice! archives for more information.

So, how much cholesterol is in shellfish? A portion of the following common types (about three and a half ounces) contains:

- Oysters: 55 milligrams (mg)
- Crab: 52 mg
- Lobster: 71 mg
- Shrimp: 194 mg

Adapted from the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) Medical Center [6].

To put these amounts in perspective, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [7] recommends that people consume no more than 200 mg of any type of cholesterol in a day.

If you’re trying to avoid adding more cholesterol to your diet, you might also consider how you cook your shellfish. To prepare it without adding cholesterol to the dish, you may want to:

- Broil, steam, or bake shellfish
- Pan-fry it in a small amount of vegetable oil
- Use wine- or tomato-based sauces (rather than cream-based)
- Garnish with lemon
As a general rule, as long as you stay conscious of portion size and maintain an otherwise balanced eating plan, shellfish can easily be incorporated into a heart healthy diet. For more information on your individual dietary needs, consider making an appointment with a registered dietician.

Alice!
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