

## Stanols and Sterols



Plant stanols and sterols, also called phytosterols and phytosterols, occur naturally in small amounts in a range of plant foods such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes, cereals and vegetable oils (e.g. soyabean and corn oil).

On average, most people's diets provide a small amount of plant stanols (20-50mg) and sterols (150-400mg) per day. Vegetarian diets can contain 50% higher amounts of sterols compared to non-vegetarian diets.

### What do Plant Stanols and Sterols do?

Plant stanols and sterols have a similar structure to cholesterol and, because of this, help to reduce the absorption of cholesterol in the gut. This helps to lower total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol (the bad type of cholesterol) levels in the blood. Both plant stanols and sterols have similar effects on cholesterol. High blood cholesterol levels increase the risk for coronary heart disease.

“ Following a healthy diet low in saturated fats in combination with eating the recommended amounts of plant stanols and sterols each day can lower LDL cholesterol by 15%. ”

### How much is needed to help lower blood cholesterol levels?

Plant stanols and sterols are not an essential part of managing high cholesterol levels. Research has shown that 2-3 grams is needed each day to help lower cholesterol in people with raised cholesterol levels. The majority of studies show that eating more than 3 grams per day of plant stanols/sterols will not lower cholesterol levels further. However, recent studies have shown greater cholesterol lowering effects with up to 9 grams per day of plant stanols without any harmful side effects. Further research is needed to confirm these findings.

### Why are they added to foods?

Our diets do not provide enough plant stanols and sterols to help lower cholesterol. A range of food products have plant stanols and sterols added to them. These products can help us to meet the suggested effective dose to help lower cholesterol. These include milk, yogurts and yogurt drinks. Examples of brands of foods that contain these plant stanols and sterols include Benecol and Flora pro.activ as well as supermarket own brands. These products tend to be more expensive compared to ordinary spreads, milk and yogurts. If you are trying to reduce your weight, choosing the lower fat versions of these products will provide a lower amount of calories.



Products containing added plant stanols and sterols need to be eaten every day in the recommended amounts to have a beneficial effect on lowering cholesterol. The beneficial effect is lost when you stop using these products.

## Is it safe to use them with cholesterol-lowering drugs?

Studies have shown that products containing plant stanols and sterols are safe. They should not replace cholesterol-lowering medications prescribed by your doctor but can be used in addition to these medications. This may have a greater overall effect on lowering cholesterol levels. If you do not have raised cholesterol levels, there is no benefit from including these foods in the diet. Products containing plant stanols and sterols are not recommended for children under the age of 5 years, breastfeeding or pregnant women.



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## Examples of how the suggested amount of daily plant stanols and sterols can be achieved:

### Product

Asda cholesterol lowering yogurt drink  
Benecol dairy free yogurt drink  
Benecol yogurt drinks  
Flora pro.activ mini yogurt drinks  
Tesco healthy living cholesterol-reducing yogurt drink

### Package Size

100g  
65.5g  
67.5g (original flavour is 70g)  
100g  
100g

### EITHER

one of the drinks to the left per day

### OR

2-3 servings of the products below per day

### Product Type

Spreads



Milk



Yogurts

Cream cheese style spread



### Product

Benecol spreads (light, olive and buttery tastes)  
Flora pro.activ spreads (light, olive and buttery tastes)

Flora pro.activ skimmed milk

Benecol low fat bio yogurts

Benecol light cream cheese style spread

### Serving amount providing 1 portion of stanols/sterols

12g (>2 level teaspoons)

10g (2 level teaspoons)

250ml (1 medium glass)

125g (1 pot)

20g (4 level teaspoons)

## Summary

High blood cholesterol levels increase the risk for coronary heart disease. Although plant stanols and sterols are not an essential part of managing high cholesterol levels, research has shown that following a healthy diet low in saturated fats in combination with eating the recommended amounts of plant stanols and sterols each day can lower LDL cholesterol by 15%.

Our diets do not provide enough to help lower cholesterol but there are a range of food products that have plant stanols and sterols added to them which can help us meet the suggested effective dose to help lower cholesterol. However, they should not replace cholesterol-lowering medications prescribed by your doctor but can be used in addition.

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