

■ **NIACIN** Also known as vitamin B₃, niacin lowers both LDL and triglycerides, and may be the single most potent way to increase HDL. See your doctor before taking niacin, whose side effects include skin sensitivity and liver problems, and ask about a new longer-acting, FDA-approved prescription formulation called Niaspan. If you do take over-the-counter niacin, keep the dose to about 15 to 20 mg per day.

■ **NUTS** In one study, people who ate 3 ounces of almonds daily dropped their LDL by an average of 21 points within a month. Almonds and other nuts contain a high percentage of monounsaturated fats.

■ **OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS (FISH OIL)** The ongoing Physicians' Health Study at Harvard found that men who ate one or two fish meals a week suffered fewer cases of sudden cardiac death. Omega-3 fatty acids are polyunsaturated fats that somehow lower cholesterol and triglycerides. Fish with the highest amounts of omega-3s include albacore tuna, salmon, and mackerel.

■ **SOLUBLE FIBER** A diet rich in water-soluble fiber (7 to 10 grams or more a day) can sink LDL by 5 percent to 10 percent. It works by binding to bile acids in the intestines and flushing these out of the body; the liver then must remove chole-

sterol from the blood to make more bile acids. Foods high in soluble fiber include oat bran, beans, chickpeas, and fruits such as grapefruit, apples, and grapes.

■ **SOY PROTEIN** An analysis of studies on soy protein in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in the mid-1990s concluded that a regular diet of tofu, soy milk, and similar products can diminish LDL cholesterol by 9 percent to 12 percent. In the fall, the FDA approved the health claim that 25 grams of soy protein a day, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may help reduce the risk of heart disease, and food manufacturers are now allowed to add that claim to labels of foods rich in soy.

■ **VITAMIN E** The recently completed Cambridge Heart Antioxidant Study (nicknamed CHAOS) randomly assigned either placebos or high-dose vitamin E (400 or 800 IU per day) to 2,002 men and women with significant hardening of the coronary arteries. After 500 days of treatment, the patients receiving vitamin E supplementation were 52 percent less likely to have had a major cardiovascular event than were patients on the placebo. The question that remains is whether taking vitamin E will inoculate a healthy heart against future problems. Vitamin E is thought to inhibit LDL oxidation. Most experts recommend a daily intake of 400 IU.

—J.T.