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Cholesterol: The Silent Risk in Filipinos

Why it matters, what to eat, and how to **protect your heart**

<200

mg/dL Total Cholesterol Goal

<100

mg/dL LDL Target (most patients)

≥60

mg/dL HDL Goal (protective)

1 Why Lower Your Cholesterol?



Prevents Artery Plaque
Less heart attack risk



Protects the Brain
Lowers stroke risk



Protects the Heart
Less chest pain



Slows CKD Damage
Kidneys need clean vessels



May Reduce Meds
Diet can lower statin dose



More Energy
Better blood flow

2 LDL vs HDL — Know the Difference

LDL ↑

"BAD" — Lower is Better

- Builds plaque in arteries
- Raised by sat fat & trans fat
- Target: <100 mg/dL
- High risk: <55–70 mg/dL

VS

HDL ↑

"GOOD" — Higher is Better

- Removes cholesterol from vessels
- Raised by exercise & omega-3
- Target: ≥60 mg/dL
- <40 M / <50 F = high risk

△ **Triglycerides (TG) — The Hidden Danger in Filipino Diets**

Normal: <150 mg/dL. Raised mainly by **white rice, softdrinks, sugary drinks, alcohol, and instant noodles** — the staples of many Filipino diets. High TG raises cardiovascular risk even when LDL looks "normal."

3 Top Cholesterol Threats in Filipino Cooking



Coconut Oil & Gata
92% Saturated Fat



Pork Skin / Lard / Chicharon
Highest LDL-raisers



Processed Meats
Spam, Hotdog, CDO, Tocino



Large White Rice Portions
Biggest TG-raiser



Softdrinks & Juice Drinks
35–40g sugar → TG spike



Beer & Gin
Alcohol raises TG fast

4 How Different Fats Move Your Lipid Panel

Fat Type	LDL	HDL	TG	Common Philippine Sources
Saturated Fat (SFA)	↑↑	—	—	Coconut oil (VCO, Minola), lard, butter, gata, chicharon, lechon, fatty pork, full-fat cheese
Trans Fat (TFA) worst	↑↑	↓↓	—	Partially hydrogenated margarine, commercial fried food — avoid entirely
Monounsaturated (MUFA)	↓	—	—	Canola oil, olive oil, avocado, pili nuts, cashews, almonds
Omega-3 PUFA (EPA/DHA)	—	↑	↓↓	Sardinas (lata), galunggong, bangus, salmon — aim for 2 servings/week
Soluble Fiber	↓	—	—	Oatmeal, monggo, okra, kamote — 5–10 g/day lowers LDL ~5–11 mg/dL
Sugar & Refined Carbs	—	↓	↑↑	White rice (large portions), softdrinks, instant noodles, white bread — biggest TG driver in Filipino diet
Alcohol	—	—	↑↑	Beer, gin, lambanog — even moderate use raises TG; stopping often drops TG 30–50% in weeks

5 Your Lipid Target Numbers

Know Your Numbers

Total Cholesterol
<200
mg/dL

LDL-C (bad)
<100
mg/dL

HDL-C (good)
≥60
mg/dL

Triglycerides
<150
mg/dL

Non-HDL-C
<130
mg/dL

TG/HDL Ratio
<3.5
ratio

High-risk patients (CKD, diabetes, prior heart attack): LDL target may be <55–70 mg/dL — ask your doctor

6 Simple Kitchen Swaps That Work

REMOVE

→ USE INSTEAD

Coconut oil / lard

→ **Canola oil or olive oil**

Pork belly (liempo)

→ **Chicken breast or pork loin (kasim)**

Lechon / chicharon snack

→ **30g pili nuts or fresh fruit**

Gata-heavy laing / Bicol express

→ **Tinola or pinakbet (canola oil)**

White rice (3+ cups/day)

→ **Half brown rice + smaller portions**

3-in-1 coffee / softdrinks

→ **Black barako coffee / salabat / water**

Spam / hotdog / processed meat

→ **Sardinas (lata) or fresh tilapia**

Leche flan / halo-halo

→ **Fresh papaya or boiled saba banana**

Food Item (Filipino Name)	Typical Serving	SF	SUG	CHOL	Rating	Key Note
A · LUTONG-BAHAY — PORK & BEEF DISHES						
Lechon baboy (whole roasted pig)	1 slice 100g	H	L	H	AVOID	Skin = pure saturated fat; organ stuffing raises dietary cholesterol further
Crispy pata (deep-fried pork knuckle)	1 piece 150g	H	L	H	AVOID	Pork skin + knuckle = very high saturated fat and dietary cholesterol
Chicharon bulaklak (pork mesentery, fried)	50 g	H	L	H	AVOID	Organ membrane deep-fried in lard; among the highest sat-fat snacks in Filipino cuisine
Dinuguan (pork blood stew)	1 cup	H	L	H	AVOID	Pork blood + innards in pork fat broth; very high in cholesterol and sat fat
Laing (taro leaves in coconut cream)	1 cup	H	L	L	AVOID	Coconut cream = 15–25 g saturated fat per serving; reduce to minimal light gata
Bicol express (pork + gata + chili)	1 cup	H	L	M	AVOID	Double fat load: pork belly + thick coconut cream; use light gata + pork loin to modify
Kare-kare + bagoong (peanut oxtail stew)	1 bowl	H	M	M	AVOID	Peanut sauce + oxtail fat; bagoong adds very high sodium — also risky for CKD
Longganisa Vigan / sweet (cured fatty pork)	2 links 80g	H	M	M	AVOID	High sat fat + high sodium + sugar; nitrite preservatives compound cardiovascular risk
Paksiw na lechon / lechon sauce	1 cup	H	M	H	AVOID	Lechon fat recooked in liver-rich sauce; double cholesterol hit — liver is very high in CHOL
Adobo (pork belly, with skin)	1 cup	H	L	M	LIMIT	Use pork loin instead of belly; remove skin; drain fat before serving to reduce sat fat ~40%
Bulalo (bone marrow beef soup)	1 bowl	H	L	H	LIMIT	Bone marrow = very high cholesterol; eat lean meat only; discard fatty broth and marrow
Sinigang na baboy (pork)	1 bowl	M	L	M	LIMIT	Use lean pork (kasim); sinigang na isda is a far better swap with more omega-3
Menudo / Afritada / Caldereta (pork)	1 cup	M	M	M	LIMIT	Use lean pork; liver spread in caldereta adds dietary cholesterol — reduce amount or omit
Tocino (sweet-cured pork belly)	2 slices 80g	H	M	M	LIMIT	High sat fat + added sugar; prefer homemade lean pork versions; occasional treat only
Arroz caldo (pork or chicken rice porridge)	1 bowl	L	H	L	LIMIT	Low fat but high refined carbs (TG risk); use brown rice; top with tokwa instead of pork
Tinola (chicken + malunggay / sayote)	1 bowl	L	L	L	GOOD	Remove skin; eat chicken + vegetables; excellent everyday meal — best home-cooked option
Chicken adobo sa puti (no skin, no liver)	1 cup	L	L	L	GOOD	Lean chicken breast adobo; vinegar-based cooking preserves flavor without extra fat
Nilagang manok (boiled chicken)	1 bowl	L	L	L	GOOD	Excellent — remove skin; eat meat and vegetables; discard broth to reduce sodium
B · ISDA AT PAGKAIN SA DAGAT — FISH & SEAFOOD						
Crispy fried bangus (whole, with skin)	1 small	M	L	M	AVOID	Frying in coconut oil or lard adds large sat fat load; eat grilled or steamed instead
Sugpo / hipon (shrimp)	8 pcs medium	L	L	H	LIMIT	Low sat fat but high dietary cholesterol (~150mg/serving); limit to 1–2x/week
Pusit (squid, grilled or adobo)	1 cup	L	L	M	LIMIT	Moderate dietary cholesterol; avoid deep-fried tempura version
Talaba (oysters, raw or grilled)	6 pieces	L	L	M	LIMIT	Rich in zinc and omega-3; moderate cholesterol; avoid fried versions
Sinigang na bangus / tilapia / labahita	1 bowl	L	L	L	GOOD	Best Filipino soup — fish + vegetables + tamarind; limit broth intake for sodium
Inihaw na bangus (grilled milkfish, no skin)	1 medium	L	L	L	GOOD	Excellent omega-3 source; remove skin to cut sat fat further
Inihaw na galunggong (round scad, grilled)	2–3 pieces	L	L	L	GOOD	Best budget omega-3 fish in PH markets; grill or steam; avoid frying in coconut oil
Sardinas sa kamatis (canned, tomato sauce)	1 can	L	L	L	GOOD	Affordable EPA/DHA omega-3; choose tomato sauce or water — NOT oil-packed
Tilapia (steamed or grilled)	1 medium	L	L	L	GOOD	Lean white fish; mild omega-3; very affordable; cook without coconut oil
Tuyo (dried herring, grilled not fried)	2 pieces	L	L	L	GOOD	Good omega-3; very high sodium — limit to 1–2x/week; do NOT fry in extra oil
C · GULAY AT LEGUMES — VEGETABLES & LEGUMES · EAT FREELY						
Monggo guisado (mung bean stew)	1 cup	L	L	L	GOOD	Best soluble fiber staple; LDL-lowering; use canola oil, not lard, for sautéing
Pinakbet (no bagoong, canola oil)	1 cup	L	L	L	GOOD	Okra, ampalaya, eggplant — fiber-rich, LDL-lowering; skip the bagoong and lard
Ginisang kangkong (sautéed water spinach)	1 cup	L	L	L	GOOD	Use canola oil + garlic; add tokwa for protein; affordable heart-healthy staple
Ampalaya con huevo (bitter melon + egg)	1 cup	L	L	M	GOOD	Ampalaya lowers LDL and blood sugar; egg adds moderate dietary cholesterol — limit to 1 egg
Lumpiang sariwa (fresh spring rolls)	2 rolls	L	L	L	GOOD	Excellent — vegetables + tokwa wrapped in rice paper; avoid the fried lumpia version
Okra (steamed or in sinigang)	1 cup	L	L	L	GOOD	Highest soluble fiber vegetable in PH; viscous mucilage binds cholesterol in the gut
D · STREET FOOD · PAGKAIN SA KALYE						

Cholesterol in Filipino Foods — Heat Map

Fast Food · Grocery & Packaged Foods · Cooking Oils · Drinks · Lifestyle & Sample Day

Food Item (Brand / Chain)	Typical Serving	SF	SUG	CHOL	Rating	Key Note
F · FAST FOOD — JOLLIBEE · MANG INASAL · KFC · MCDONALD'S · CHOWKING						
Jollibee Chickenjoy (with skin + gravy)	1 piece	H	M	H	AVOID	Skin + batter = high sat fat; gravy adds sodium + starch thickeners + phosphate additives
KFC Original Recipe (with skin)	1 piece	H	L	H	AVOID	11-herb batter seals high sat fat in; skin contains most of the phosphate additives
Jolly Hotdog Classic (with cheese)	1 sandwich	H	M	M	AVOID	Hotdog = high sat fat + sodium phosphate; cheese adds more sat fat
Jollibee Jolly Spaghetti	1 regular	M	H	M	AVOID	Sweet banana ketchup sauce = high sugar → TG↑↑; hotdog slices add sat fat
McD McSpicy / McCrispy (with skin)	1 sandwich	H	M	H	AVOID	High sat fat from breading + palm oil frying; remove breading and skin to reduce impact
Burger King Whopper / McD Big Mac	1 burger	H	M	H	AVOID	Double beef patty + cheese + mayo = ~20g sat fat per burger; worst fast food choice
Chowking Lauriat (fried chicken + pork)	1 set	H	M	H	AVOID	Fried protein + sweet sauce + white rice combo = high sat fat + high TG
Mang Inasal Liempo (grilled pork belly)	1 slab	H	L	M	AVOID	Even grilled, pork belly fat remains; avoid the marinade-basted skin portions
Jollibee Chickenjoy (skin removed, no gravy)	1 piece	M	L	M	LIMIT	Removing skin cuts sat fat by ~40%; no gravy reduces sodium and thickeners significantly
Mang Inasal Paa (thigh, with skin)	1 piece	M	L	M	LIMIT	Grilled > fried; remove skin; use vinegar dip instead of chicken oil
McDo Filet-O-Fish	1 sandwich	M	M	M	LIMIT	Better than beef/chicken options; tartar sauce adds sat fat — ask for less sauce
Chowking Congee / Arroz caldo	1 bowl	L	H	L	LIMIT	Low fat but refined carb-heavy → TG↑; filling; avoid extra toppings
Mang Inasal Pecho (breast, no skin, vinegar dip)	1 piece	L	L	L	GOOD	Best fast food order in PH; grilled chicken breast + vinegar dip; skip chicken oil and unlimited rice
Chowking Tofu Sisig	1 serving	L	L	L	GOOD	Plant protein; low sat fat and cholesterol; watch sodium in sauce
McDo side corn / side salad (no dressing)	1 side	L	L	L	GOOD	Best side dish choices; request no dressing or use lemon wedge instead
G · GROCERY & PACKAGED FOODS — LATA · NAKA-PACK · SUPERMARKET						
Spam Original (Hormel)	2 slices 57g	H	L	M	AVOID	10g sat fat per serving + very high sodium; most popular processed meat in PH
Purefoods / CDO Hotdog (regular)	2 pieces	H	L	M	AVOID	High sat fat + sodium phosphate additives (100% absorbed); check label for "phosphate"
Argentina / CDO Corned Beef	½ can	H	L	M	AVOID	High sat fat + very high sodium; carrageenan filler in lower-grade brands
Ligo / CDO Vienna Sausage	1 can	H	L	M	AVOID	Processed pork + high sodium + phosphate preservatives; no nutritional benefit
Coconut cream / gata (Kara, Aroy-D)	½ cup	H	L	L	AVOID	~20g sat fat per ½ cup; most common hidden cholesterol-raiser in Filipino home cooking
Condensed milk (Alaska, Magnolia, Nestlé)	2 tbsp	M	H	M	AVOID	Very high sugar + sat fat; used in coffee, kakanin, and leche flan
Lucky Me Instant Pancit Canton / cup noodles	1 pack	M	H	L	AVOID	Palm-oil fried noodles + very high sodium + MSG; regular use raises TG and LDL
Eden / Quickmelt / Kraft Cheese	1 slice	H	L	M	AVOID	Processed cheese = high sat fat + sodium; Philippine processed cheese brands among highest in sat fat
Whole egg (native or commercial)	1 large	L	L	H	LIMIT	1 egg/day acceptable for most; hyper-responders (25% of people) should limit to 4/week
Whole fresh milk (Anchor, Alaska, Bear Brand)	1 glass 250mL	M	M	M	LIMIT	Replace with low-fat (1%) or skim milk; or switch to Vitasoy soy milk
Canned tuna in oil (Century, Mega)	1 can	L	L	L	LIMIT	Tuna itself is healthy; oil-packed adds unnecessary fat — choose water-packed version
Sardines in tomato sauce (555, Ligo, San Marino)	1 can	L	L	L	GOOD	Affordable omega-3; LDL and TG lowering; eat 3–4x/week; NOT in oil or cream sauce
Canned tuna in water (Century, Mega)	1 can	L	L	L	GOOD	Lean protein + omega-3; versatile; watch sodium in flavored variants
Quaker Rolled Oats (plain)	½ cup dry	L	L	L	GOOD	β-glucan fiber lowers LDL 5–8%; best breakfast; do NOT add condensed milk or sugar
Canola oil (Baguio Gold, Mazola Canola)	1 tbsp	L	L	L	GOOD	Best all-purpose cooking oil in PH: high MUFA, low SFA; replaces lard and coconut oil
Tokwa / firm tofu (fresh or packed)	½ block	L	L	L	GOOD	Plant protein; replaces pork in adobo, menudo, scrambles; soy protein modestly lowers LDL
Pili nuts (Bicolano native nut)	30g handful	L	L	L	GOOD	Native PH nut high in MUFA + PUFA; cardioprotective; best snack alternative to chicharon
H · COOKING OILS & FATS — MANTIKA AT TABA						
Coconut oil (VCO, Minola, Natura)	1 tbsp	H	L	L	AVOID	92% saturated fat — highest of any oil; consistent LDL-raiser in clinical trials