September is cholesterol education month. More than 95 million US adults 20 years or older have high cholesterol levels.

High cholesterol doesn’t have any symptoms, so many people don’t know their cholesterol level is too high, but a simple blood test at the doctors’ office can check your levels for you. Making sure your cholesterol is within the healthy range is important to reduce your risk for heart disease.

Know your numbers:
- HDL cholesterol (“good” cholesterol) protects against heart disease. Aim for HDL levels higher than 60mg/dL.
- LDL cholesterol (“bad” cholesterol) can lead to many heart-related conditions like heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure. Aim to keep your LDL levels under 130 mg/dl.
- Triglycerides (TG) are another type of fat found in the blood. A healthy TG level is 150mg/dl or lower. High TG increases heart disease risk.

Blood cholesterol levels are affected by: being overweight/obese, eating saturated fats, smoking, and drinking alcohol. However, cholesterol levels can be improved through diet and exercise.

To keep your cholesterol levels within a health range:
- Eat a MyPlate friendly meal plan rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, and low-fat milk.
- Replace saturated fats (solid at room temperature) with unsaturated fats (e.g. oils) to lower LDL levels.
- Be active. Aim for 150 minutes of physical activity weekly. Exercise helps to prevent heart disease and obesity, while lowering LDL cholesterol and increasing HDL cholesterol!

Adapted from: https://food.unl.edu/documents/Sept_Cholesterol_9-1_11_Web_correx.pdf
Loaded Potato Soup

Serves: 6 | Serving Size: 1 cup

**INGREDIENTS**

1 1/2 cups instant mashed potatoes (dry)
1 T soft margarine
1 medium onion (1 cup)
1/2 cup green pepper
1 can (14.5 oz) low sodium chicken broth
1 cup nonfat milk
1 cup frozen peas, thawed
1/2 tsp ground black pepper
4 slices American cheese

**INSTRUCTIONS AND TIPS**

1. Follow package instructions to prepare instant mashed potatoes and set aside.
2. Melt margarine in a large saucepan over medium heat. Stir in onion and green pepper, if desired. Cook until the vegetables begin to soften (about 5 minutes).
3. Stir in the broth and heat to a boil. Stir in milk, potatoes, peas, and pepper. Heat through, stirring occasionally.
4. Add the cheese slices. Cook and stir about 2 minutes until cheese melts. Add more milk if soup is thicker than you prefer.
5. Garnish with sliced green onion, bacon bits, and shredded cheese if desired.

**Storage**

Store in an airtight container in refrigerator for 1 week, or in the freezer for several weeks.

Nutritional analysis (1 cup): 230 calories, 6g fat, 2.5g saturated, 270mg sodium, 35g carbohydrates, 5g fiber, 6g sugar, 10g protein. This recipe is adapted from https://spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu/recipe/loaded-potato-soup/

**QUICK TIPS**

**Bagged Produce:** Good 3-5 days after date on the bag if unopened or 2 days past the date if opened.

**Meat:**

**Eggs:** 3-5 weeks from purchase.

**Condiments:**
- Salad dressing: 10-12 months from purchase or 1-3 months after opening. Salsa: 1 month after opening. Spaghetti sauce: 3-5 days after opening. Mayonnaise: 2 months after opening. Ketchup: 6 months after opening.

**Check Your Storage Temperatures!**

It is important to check the temperatures of your freezer, refrigerator, and pantry often to maximize food safety and minimize food waste!

Make sure your food storage areas are at the proper temperatures listed below.

**Freezer:** 0°F or below

**Refrigerator:** 40°F or below

**Pantry:** 70°F or below

Visit “Keep Food Safe! Food Safety Basics” for more helpful tips!

**Helpful Resources**

- **Chickasaw County Extension**
  641-394-2174
  www.extension.iastate.edu/chickasaw

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