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Prevention and Treatment of High Cholesterol (Hyperlipidemia)

Updated:May 3,2018



Hyperlipidemia is a medical term that means your blood has too many lipids (fats) in it, i.e., cholesterol and triglycerides. In hypercholesterolemia, there's too much LDL (bad) cholesterol in your blood. This increases fatty deposits in arteries and the risk of blockages.

Levels of HDL (good) cholesterol can also be too low. With less HDL to remove cholesterol from your arteries, your risk of plaque - and blockages - increases.

The good news is, cholesterol can be lowered, reducing the risk of heart disease and stroke. The starting point for treating high cholesterol is working closely with your doctor or healthcare provider. It takes a team to develop and maintain a successful health program. You and your healthcare professionals each have important roles in maintaining and improving your heart health.

If you're diagnosed with hyperlipidemia, your overall health and risks will help guide treatment. Rather than focus only your cholesterol levels, your doctor may discuss how they join other risk factors to affect your overall risk of heart disease. For example, age, sex, smoking and high blood pressure

are also important. These factors can all interact with high LDL cholesterol or low HDL cholesterol levels to affect your risk. Noting which risk factors you have will allow your doctor to use the National Institutes of Health's Estimate of 10-Year Risk for Coronary Heart Disease Framingham Point Score to more accurately assess your risk of a coronary event in the next 10 years.

Lifestyle changes

Hyperlipidemia can often be improved by lifestyle changes. This is true even if high cholesterol is due to genetics (familial hypercholesterolemia). Work with your doctor to create an action plan of lifestyle changes that you can make.

If lifestyle changes don't reduce your cholesterol levels enough, medication may be prescribed. Learn more about cholesterol medications.

The four lifestyle changes you may be asked to make are:

- · eating a heart-healthy diet
- regular exercise
- avoiding tobacco smoke
- · losing weight (if you're overweight or obese)

Let's look at each of these now.

Eating a heart-healthy diet

From a dietary standpoint, the best way to lower your cholesterol is reduce saturated fat and trans fat. The American Heart Association recommends limiting saturated fat to 5 to 6 percent of daily calories and minimizing the amount of



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- Home
- About Cholesterol
- HDL, LDL, and Triglycerides
- Causes of High Cholesterol
- How To Get Your Cholesterol Tested

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- Prevention & Treatment
 - Introduction The Skinny on Fats Cooking To Lower Cholesterol **Cholesterol Medications**
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trans fat you eat.

Reducing these fats means limiting your intake of red meat and dairy products made with whole milk. It also means choosing skim milk, low-fat or fat-free dairy products, limiting fried food, and cooking with healthy oils such as vegetable oil. Other aspects of a healthy diet include emphasizing fruits, vegetables, whole grains, poultry, fish and nuts and limiting sugary foods and beverages. Eating this way may help increase fiber, which is also beneficial. A diet high in fiber can help lower cholesterol levels by as much as 10 percent.

Many diets fit this pattern. They include the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) eating plan promoted by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute and diets suggested by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the American Heart Association. The pattern can be easily adapted based on your cultural and food preferences.

To be smarter about what you eat, you'll also need to pay more attention to food labels, if you don't already read them.

Know Your Fats

Knowing which fats raise LDL cholesterol and which ones don't is the first step in lowering your risk of heart disease.

Cooking for Lower Cholesterol

A heart-healthy eating plan can help you manage your blood cholesterol level.

Becoming more physically active

A sedentary lifestyle lowers HDL cholesterol. Less HDL cholesterol means there's less good cholesterol to remove LDL (bad) cholesterol from arteries.

Physical activity is important. Just 40 minutes of aerobic exercise of moderate to vigorous intensity done three to four times a week is enough to lower both cholesterol and high blood pressure. Brisk walking, swimming, bicycling or a dance class are examples. Learn more about getting active.

Quitting smoking

Smokers can lower their cholesterol levels and help protect their arteries by quitting. Nonsmokers should avoid exposure to secondhand smoke.

Smoking lowers HDL cholesterol. When a person with high cholesterol also smokes, their risk of coronary heart disease increases more than it otherwise would. Smoking compounds risk from other risk factors for heart disease, too, such as high blood pressure and diabetes. Learn more about quitting smoking.

Losing weight

Being overweight or obese tends to raise LDL cholesterol and lower HDL cholesterol.

Losing excess weight can improve cholesterol levels. A weight loss of 10 percent can go a long way toward lowering your risk of high cholesterol — or reversing it. Learn more about losing weight.

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