

Reduce Your Cholesterol Levels

The main cause of high blood cholesterol and LDL levels is a diet high in saturated fats and cholesterol. But recent research indicates that to really control the problem, you've got to exercise as well as eat a low-fat, low-cholesterol diet. Doing just one isn't nearly as effective.

Reduce total fat intake to no more than 30% of your total daily calories.

Reduce saturated fat to no more than one-third of the fat you eat. Major sources of saturated fat include butter, cheese, whole milk, cream, meat, poultry, chocolate, coconut, palm and palm kernel oil, lard and solid shortenings. Most processed foods such as cookies, crackers, and other bakery goods contain trans-fatty acids which increase cholesterol. Look for "hydrogenated" or "partially hydrogenated" oils on labels and avoid them.

Replace saturated fats with mono-unsaturated "good" fats like olive oil, canola oil, and nuts, which can lower cholesterol. Poly-unsaturated fats like corn, sesame, safflower, soybean, and sunflower oils are good, too. Use these oils for cooking and salads, and always bake or broil your food rather than frying. Instead of butter or stick margarine, use a non-fat margarine. Better yet, spread your bread with non-fat cream cheese or dip it in olive oil.

Reduce dietary cholesterol to 300 milligrams per day by avoiding dairy products made with whole milk and cream, egg yolks, and organ meats such as liver.

Eat more fish. Research shows that certain fatty fish oils in the omega-3 group reduce blood cholesterol levels. Fish especially rich in omega-3 oils are salmon, tuna, mackerel, lake trout, bluefish, herring, and sardines.

Exercise. Aerobic exercise, along with improving your diet, can reduce your blood cholesterol levels by up to 15%. Exercise will also help you lose weight and keep it off. Talk to your doctor about starting an exercise program.

Medication. If your total cholesterol, especially your LDL level, remains high despite diet changes and exercise, your doctor may recommend medications. Generally, and LDL level over 190, or an LDL over 160 with two or more risk factors, requires medication.

Hormone replacement therapy for women. Before menopause, estrogen raises levels of good HDL cholesterol, and lowers bad LDL cholesterol. When estrogen levels drop after menopause, women lose that protection. Hormone replacement therapy can cut women's risk of death from heart disease in half. Discuss the pros and cons with your doctor.

