

Lowering Cholesterol

HIGH TOTAL cholesterol is defined as 240 mg/dL, with the ideal level less than 200 mg/dL. Those between 200-239 mg/dL are considered borderline high. LDL cholesterol at 70 mg/dL is best for people with heart disease. For those at risk of heart disease, the target number is 100 mg/dL. Near ideal LDL is 100-129 mg/dL and 130-159 mg/dL is borderline high. High LDL cholesterol starts at 160-189 mg/dL and anything above 190 is very high.

HDL cholesterol is classified as poor for men if it's below 40 mg/dL and below 50 mg/dL for women. For either sex, 50-59 mg/dL is average and 60 mg/dL is best. When talking triglycerides, the best measurements are below 150 mg/dL. Borderline high starts at 150-199. The range for high is from 200-499 mg/dL and anything above 500 is very high.

Speak with your care provider about interpreting your cholesterol readings and determine a realistic goal for lowering cholesterol. It's not just a matter of making it to the average or "best" category for every cholesterol type. Your personal cardiovascular risk factors — weight, smoking, family history, etc. — will dictate your targets.

LDL cholesterol is most concerning to doctors. Technically, the ideal goal should be less than 130 mg/dL, but those at risk of heart disease can focus on 100 dL or even 70 dL. Only your doctor knows your specific risk factors and corresponding goals.

Discuss Medication

There are many lifestyle modifications that will lower cholesterol, but medication is the fastest route to a safer cholesterol level. When taken

in conjunction with an improved diet, smoking cessation or other actions, medication has the most dramatic effect.

The most common type of cholesterol lowering medication is called statins, which are reported to lower cholesterol 20-50%.

Take a Walk

Even moderate exercise can be hugely instrumental in lowering cholesterol. Walking is the easiest and least expensive exercise plan to start. If you haven't exercised much in the past, get your doctor's approval. Most medical professionals will probably recommend walking at 10 minute intervals and gradually increasing the workout duration. Ultimately, 30-45 minutes of daily exercise is usually the goal. For those who use a wireless tracker, many doctors recommend shooting for 10,000 steps per day.

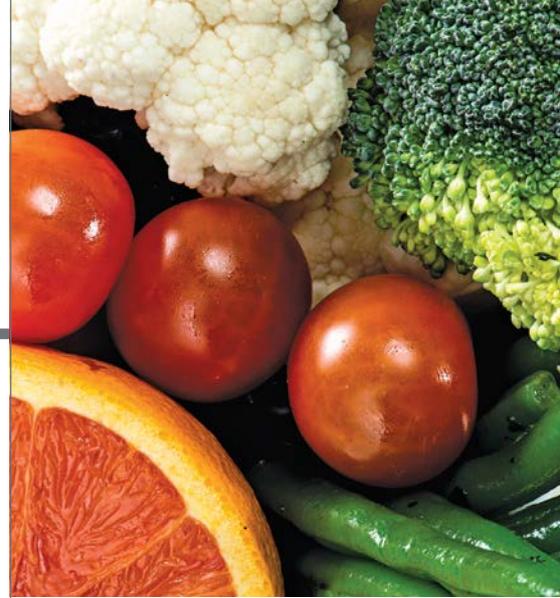
Know Your Fats

Saturated fats have the most dramatic impact on cholesterol levels. Red meat, dairy and other saturated fat culprits do the most harm in raising LDL. Nutritionists recommend getting less than 7% of your daily calories from saturated fats.

Trans fat is a no-no for anyone trying to lower cholesterol and food labels claiming "trans-fat free" can be highly deceptive. Learn to analyze food labels and be on alert when you see hydrogenated oil. Stay away from anything fried or commercially prepared snacks.

Channel the Mediterranean

An analysis of more than 1.5 million healthy adults demonstrated that following a Mediterranean diet was associated with a reduced



risk of death from heart disease and cancer, as well as a reduced incidence of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases.

The Mediterranean diet is comprised mostly of fruits, veggies, whole grains, olive oil, beans, nuts, legumes, seeds, herbs and spices. The second tier includes fish and seafood. Poultry, eggs, cheese, meats and sweets — all high in cholesterol — are consumed in moderation.

Part of the beauty of this plant-based diet is that it replaces cholesterol-laden butter and salt with olive oil and herbs, respectively. Nuts are important as well, although comparatively high in fat. A handful of non-candied or salted nuts is an integral part of the Mediterranean diet.

Curtail Drinking & Smoking

For many, the hardest part of lowering cholesterol is changing bad habits you've been practicing for decades — but it can be done. Smoking cessation is known to improve HDL cholesterol, immediately decrease blood pressure and the risk of heart attack. If you can sustain the smoke-free habit, your risk of heart disease will be the same as a lifelong non-smoker in 15 years.

Having only one alcohol drink a day is recommended for men and women older than 65. Men younger than 65 can have two drinks a day without increasing blood pressure. Wine lovers should know 5 ounces of daily red wine for women of any age and men older than 65 and 10 ounces for younger men is an endorsed part of the Mediterranean diet. ■

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