

The Low-down on Managing Cholesterol

Making the Choice to Lower Cholesterol by Starting a Healthy Lifestyle

Making diet changes and becoming more active are two factors that can help lower your LDL-C (bad cholesterol). Cholesterol medications may also help.

Managing high cholesterol is important for all adults, especially since a high level of LDL-C (bad cholesterol) is one of the factors that can play a role in a progressive disease called atherosclerosis.

Atherosclerosis, or athero for short, is the buildup of plaque in the arteries. And while you can't change some of the factors that may affect your cholesterol level or contribute to the progression of athero (like genetic makeup or family history), there are things you can do to help control other factors.

Changing your diet, losing weight, and increasing your level of physical activity are all very important ways you can reduce your LDL-C and increase your HDL-C (good cholesterol). But if diet and exercise aren't enough — the case for many people with high cholesterol — your doctor may prescribe a cholesterol-lowering medication.

Below we've put together a list of things you can do to improve your diet and your daily activity level. These changes can help get you back on the road to healthier cholesterol levels, which could help slow the progression of atherosclerosis.

Better Food Choices

Changing the way you've eaten all your life may not be easy, but it's not impossible. You don't have to give up all of your favorite foods, but you may need to reduce your total fat intake, especially saturated fats. Here are a few ways you can make better choices.



- Limit food high in cholesterol, like eggs, whole-milk dairy products, meat, shellfish, and poultry with skin
- Substitute whole grains, fruits, and vegetables for fats
- Read food labels carefully, and always check serving sizes
- Remember that the “% Daily Value” column on food labels is based on a 2,000-calorie diet; adjust daily recommendations if you eat more or fewer calories
- Control portion sizes

Becoming More Active

In addition to eating the right foods, exercising regularly and becoming more active is an important way to help lower your cholesterol. Exercising 30 minutes most days of the week, if not every day of the week, is recommended for most people. It's normal to feel a bit sore and stiff after you first start exercising, but it's not normal to feel pain.

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Stop exercising if you're really hurting, and see your doctor. Remember to consult your doctor before starting any exercise plan, and then keep these important tips in mind.

- Drink water before, during, and after exercise (even water workouts) to replace the water you lose by sweating
- Wear lightweight, loose-fitting clothes so you can move easily
- Wear supportive athletic shoes for weight-bearing activities
- Remember to have fun! Choose exercises you enjoy so you don't get bored
- Start out slowly and work up to a higher level; don't push yourself too hard at first
- It's OK to take a break when you need one
- Bring a friend — an exercise buddy can help keep you motivated
- Give yourself a small reward every time you reach a goal

Everyday Activities

You may think the only way to add exercise to your daily routine is to go to a gym or run in the park for an hour. The truth is that many regular activities are also good for you. Here are some simple ways to add more activity to your daily schedule.

- Raking the lawn and bagging leaves or grass
- Hanging laundry on a clothesline
- Sweeping
- Ballroom, line, or other dancing
- Walking or hiking
- Recreational swimming
- Yoga

When Diet and Exercise Aren't Enough

Because of uncontrollable factors like genetic makeup and getting older, diet and exercise may not be enough for some people to lower their cholesterol and slow the progression of atherosclerosis. If this is the case for you, your doctor may decide that you need medication. But it's important to remember that medication can't do the job all by itself. You'll still need to eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly to achieve your cholesterol goals.

Additional Resources

If you are looking for more information about cholesterol and atherosclerosis and how they may affect your health, you might find these resources helpful.

American Heart Association

www.americanheart.org

Mayo Clinic

www.mayoclinic.com

National Cholesterol Education Program

www.nhlbi.nih.gov/chd

US AGAINST ATHERO

www.athero.com