

Nutritional Approaches for Reducing Cholesterol Levels - Part 2

In Part 1, the reasons why you should be concerned about cholesterol and what some of the recommended levels of total serum cholesterol were discussed. Here in Part 2, things that can affect your cholesterol levels and which of those things you can do something about and those you cannot do anything about; and things to consider in a cholesterol reduction plan are presented.

What Affects Your Cholesterol Levels? A variety of things can affect cholesterol levels. These are things you can do something about:

- **Diet.** Saturated fat and cholesterol in the food you eat can make your blood cholesterol level go up. Saturated fat is the main culprit, but cholesterol in foods also matters. Reducing the amount of saturated fat and cholesterol in your diet helps lower your blood cholesterol level.
- **Weight.** Being overweight is a risk factor for heart disease. It also tends to increase your cholesterol. Losing weight can help lower your LDL and total cholesterol levels, as well as raise your HDL and lower your triglyceride levels.
- **Physical Activity.** Not being physically active is a risk factor for heart disease. Regular physical activity can help lower LDL cholesterol and raise HDL cholesterol levels. It also helps you lose weight. Most health care professionals recommend that you try to be physically active for 30 minutes on most, if not all, days. Things you cannot do anything about also can affect cholesterol levels. These include:

- **Age and Gender.** As women and men get older, their cholesterol levels rise. Before the age of menopause, women have lower total cholesterol levels than men of the same age. After the age of menopause, women's LDL levels tend to rise.
- **Heredity.** Your genes partly determine how much cholesterol your body makes. High blood cholesterol can run in families.

You Can Reduce Your Cholesterol with a Cholesterol Reduction Plan The main goal of a cholesterol reduction plan is to lower your LDL level enough to reduce your risk of developing heart disease or having a heart attack. The higher your risk, the lower your LDL goal will be. There are two main ways to lower your cholesterol:

- **Eating a cholesterol-reducing diet, being physically active and managing your weight.** This is an effective method in reducing your LDL to your goal level.

The National Cholesterol Education Program (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute) recommends a cholesterol-reducing diet that is a low-saturated-fat, low-cholesterol eating plan that has less than 7% of calories from saturated fat and less than 200 mg of dietary cholesterol per day. It recommends only enough calories to maintain a desirable weight and avoid weight gain. If your LDL is not lowered enough by reducing your saturated fat and cholesterol intakes, the amount of soluble fiber in your diet can be increased. Supplementing your diet with certain nutrients, such as vitamin C, can also help in reducing your cholesterol levels.

Losing weight, if you are overweight, can help lower LDL and is especially important for those with a cluster of risk factors that includes high triglyceride and/or low HDL levels and being overweight with a large waist measurement (more than 40 inches for men and more than 35 inches for women). Regular physical activity (30 minutes on most, if not all, days) is recommended for everyone. It can help raise HDL and lower LDL and is especially important for those with high triglyceride and/or low HDL levels who are overweight with a large waist measurement.

- **If the lifestyle change of diet, physical activity and weight management are not effective in lowering your LDL to an acceptable level; your health care professional may prescribe cholesterol-lowering drugs, which are used in addition to your diet, exercise and weight management plan.**

In Part 3, find out about nutritional options for reducing cholesterol levels.

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About the Author

Nutrition and health articles from Prevention magazine include diet and nutrition information on a variety.

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