

WELLNESS CONNECTION

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INSPIRE TO MOVE - Lifestyle Changes to Improve Cholesterol



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Have you ever had your cholesterol checked? It is wise to know your numbers. High cholesterol is sometimes genetic, but lifestyle choices are a huge factor. The [American Heart Association](#) recommends that all adults have their cholesterol [checked](#) every 4 to 6 years, starting at age 20, which is when cholesterol levels can start to rise. It is helpful to know that there is both good and bad cholesterol, and how to increase good cholesterol and lower bad cholesterol with a few lifestyle changes. Small changes now will yield big payoffs later.

The good and the bad.

I distinguish the two types by saying I want a LOW (L) amount of LDL and I want a HIGH (H) amount of HDL.

- **LDL (low-density lipoprotein), sometimes called “bad” cholesterol**, makes up most of your body’s cholesterol. High levels of LDL cholesterol raise your risk for heart disease and stroke.

- **HDL (high-density lipoprotein), or “good” cholesterol**, absorbs cholesterol and carries it back to the liver. The liver then flushes it from the body. High levels of HDL cholesterol can lower your risk for heart disease and stroke.

Know your numbers.

Good cholesterol levels for adults are less than 200, but the lower the better. Borderline to moderately elevated is 200-239 and high is 240 or higher. [Check out this chart for more in-depth details and numbers for children.](#)

Lifestyle changes.

A few super [food choices for lowering LDL cholesterol](#) are:

- **Whole grains like oats and barley.** They deliver soluble fiber which can help lower the risk for heart disease.
- **Beans.** They are especially rich in soluble fiber.
- **Nuts.** Eating 2 ounces of nuts a day can slightly lower LDL, on the order of 5%. Nuts have additional nutrients that protect the heart in other ways.
- **Apples, grapes, strawberries, citrus fruits.** Rich in pectin, a type of soluble fiber that lowers LDL.
- **Soy.** Consuming 25 grams of soy protein a day (10 ounces of tofu or 2 1/2 cups of soy milk) can lower LDL by 5 to 6%.
- **Fatty fish.** Eating fish two or three times a week can lower LDL in two ways: by replacing meat, which has LDL-boosting saturated fats, and by delivering LDL-lowering omega-3 fats. Omega-3s reduce triglycerides in the bloodstream and protect the heart by helping prevent the onset of abnormal heart rhythms. The best fish choices in terms of lowering cholesterol are tuna, salmon, halibut, and swordfish. If you don't care for fish, consider taking omega-3 supplements.

A few exercises for lowering LDL cholesterol are:

- Walking
- Running
- Cycling
- Resistance training
- Swimming
- Yoga

The theme here is just move. The [American Heart Association \(AHA\)](#) advises people to aim for a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise per week to lower LDL, or “bad” cholesterol levels.

Sometimes healthy lifestyle changes aren't enough to lower cholesterol levels. If your doctor recommends medication to help lower your cholesterol, take it as prescribed while continuing your lifestyle changes. Lifestyle changes can help you keep your medication dose low.

No content in this article should ever be used as a substitute for direct medical advice from your doctor or other qualified clinicians. Please talk with an expert if you find out your LDL cholesterol is high. I want you to live a happy, healthy life.

