

What to Do About Low HDL Cholesterol

Although you may hear a lot about lowering cholesterol numbers, HDL cholesterol is one type of cholesterol that you want as high as possible. That's because HDL cholesterol is thought to carry low-density lipoprotein (LDL), or "bad," cholesterol away from the arteries and back to the liver, where it's removed from the body.

Boost HDL with Lifestyle Changes

There are a number of lifestyle changes you can make to improve your HDL cholesterol level. Thankfully, most of these steps lower your LDL level at the same time, providing extra heart-healthy benefits. Try to:

- **Aim for a healthy weight.** Being overweight is a risk factor for heart disease. Losing weight can reduce your LDL cholesterol level while also increasing your HDL level.
- **Get moving.** Not only can exercise boost your HDL level, it can also help you shed pounds. Try to get at least 150 minutes (two hours and 30 minutes) of moderate-intensity aerobic activity every week. This can include taking a brisk walk, riding a bike or playing a sport.
- **Clean up your diet.** Saturated and trans fats are thought to lower your HDL cholesterol level, as well as raise LDL cholesterol. Limit both by eating leaner cuts of meat, low-fat or fat-free dairy products, and fewer desserts and packaged or fried foods. Focus instead on eating lots of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- **Kick the habit.** Smoking is linked to lower HDL cholesterol as well as higher LDL cholesterol. Improving your cholesterol levels is just one more reason to quit. Ask your provider for resources that can help.

Remember, you have the power to help increase your HDL level through choices you make every day. Make your heart a priority and talk with your provider for help in getting started.



Sources include the American Heart Association, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health.