

Reducing Cholesterol

Maintaining a good cholesterol level can be a confusing process for many. But it's important to combat the risk of heart disease or stroke, as high cholesterol levels are leading factors for those conditions.

It is first important to understand that not all cholesterol is bad. High-density lipoprotein (HDL), otherwise known as "good" cholesterol, helps to clear cholesterol out of the blood and prevent heart disease. As a result, it is good to have more HDL in the body. Contrarily, low-density lipoprotein (LDL), or "bad" cholesterol, can build up inside arteries as they flow through the blood and cause clots that narrow the arteries. That clotting can cause heart disease or strokes. Therefore, you want to have lower levels of LDL.

A great way to defend against high LDL levels is to start with monitoring your diet. As with anything, you want to make sure to maintain a healthy lifestyle, which includes proper dieting. The first step in maintaining a good diet is to avoid overeating. WebMD.com recommends eating portions according to what can fit in the palm of your hand. Eating more food than what is recommended can cause weight gain, and obesity is a leading risk factor for heart disease.

In addition to lowering portion size, eating the right foods is critical. It is always wise to consume five-to-nine servings of fresh fruits and vegetables each day, while lowering intake of fatty foods. Eating fish is recommended because it low in saturated fat but high in healthy Omega-3 fatty acids that lowers the levels of fat in the blood. Adding whole grains to your diet will help to reduce LDL levels and make you feel fuller throughout the day based on the fiber and complex carbohydrates found in such foods as oatmeal, whole-grain cereals, wild or brown rice and popcorn. Eating one ounce of nuts each day can lower the risk of heart disease by lowering bad cholesterol levels while leaving good ones. Since eating some fats is necessary, it's important to eat unsaturated fats that lower LDL levels and raise HDL levels, and avoid saturated and trans fats like those found in butter.

Eating healthy is only half the battle. It's also important to be active. It is recommend to exercise about 30 minutes each day for at least five days out of the week in order to reduce LDL levels and improve HDL ones. You don't even need to do all 30 minutes at once – it's okay to break it up throughout the day. Something as simple as walking or doing in-home aerobics are terrific ways to get a daily workout in, especially if you don't have the time to get to the gym. Since stress has also been known to increase cholesterol, it is important to focus on your mental well-being with exercises like meditation.

Above all else, consult your doctor. Make sure to get regular checkups to monitor your cholesterol levels and work with your doctor to set up a proper diet and workout regime that can help balance your cholesterol levels and reduce the chances of suffering from heart disease.