

Simple ways to lower cholesterol



You can't feel or see high cholesterol, but it's nothing to brush aside. People with high cholesterol have twice the risk of heart disease as those who have normal levels. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says 1 out of 3 American adults has high cholesterol — and less than half of them get the treatment they need.

A simple blood test, done at least every five years, can tell you if you have high cholesterol. If your levels are high, your doctor may put you on a cholesterol-lowering program. This may include medicine, but often includes changes you can make at home to be healthier.



Lifestyle changes are an important way to lower high cholesterol and cut your risk of heart disease. Even if your cholesterol isn't high, these changes can help you keep it at a healthy level. The American Academy of Family Physicians says people should:

- **Avoid smoking or quit if you do smoke.** Smoking lowers your good cholesterol. Talk to your doctor if you need help quitting tobacco.
- **Work toward a healthy weight.** Losing just a few pounds can lower bad cholesterol and triglycerides.
- **Get active.** Exercise can raise HDL (good) cholesterol and lower LDL (bad) cholesterol and triglycerides. Try for 30 minutes of activity, 5 days per week.
- **Get more fiber in your diet.** Soluble fiber, found in oats, legumes, and fruits and vegetables, may help lower cholesterol.

- **Eat healthy fats.** Avoid saturated and trans fats found in many processed, fried and animal foods. Focus on healthy fats found in olive oil, fish, avocados, seeds and nuts.
- **Eat more vegetarian proteins.** Beans, nuts, peas, soy and lentils are healthy proteins that don't have the saturated fats found in most meat.
- **Limit foods with cholesterol.** Healthy people should eat less than 300 milligrams of cholesterol per day. People with heart disease may need to eat less than 200 milligrams a day.
- **Ask about supplements.** Some natural supplements can help lower cholesterol in addition to making healthy diet and exercise changes. These include:
 - Plant sterols and stanols
 - Omega-3 fatty acids (usually found in fish oil supplements)
 - Red yeast rice

Always ask your doctor before taking any natural supplements, especially if you have health conditions or take any medicines.