

# What you can do to raise your **the good HDL,** cholesterol



In order to understand how lifestyle affects our heart health, let's take a brief look at how cholesterol works in the body.

In an ideal situation, the liver produces and the diet provides cholesterol, which is carried by LDL (the "bad" cholesterol) throughout the body, serving vital functions. The HDL then shuttles the cholesterol back to the liver for recycling so that too much doesn't build up in the bloodstream. Problems arise when there is too much LDL, and not enough HDL to carry it back, creating an imbalance that may lead to heart disease.

HDL is a protein made by the body. Like LDL, HDL is not actually a component of food. It is made by the body, and is primarily genetically determined. However, we all have the ability to influence the formation of either LDL or HDL with our lifestyle, which includes diet and exercise programs. Cholesterol is a component of food, and is found only in animal products like meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and dairy foods.

And yes, there are several ways to increase HDL, the "good" cholesterol.

**Exercise!** Every little bit counts: stairs, walking, biking, upper body and lower body weight training. You don't have to be an Olympic athlete, though you do need to be consistent. This tried and true way of increasing HDL cholesterol works over time. While we tend to think of exercise as an excellent way to burn calories and tone up muscles, exercise is also the quickest way to improve your state of mind, and many first-time exercisers will experience this benefit in as little as 2 weeks. Make exercise a priority!



- **Fish!** The intake of several fish meals each week has been observed to increase HDL cholesterol, even over a short amount of time. Choose the fatty fish, such as salmon, sardines, herring, mackerel, and sea bass. Make them tasty and appealing, and consume these fairly regularly. Fish oil in supplemental form has also been shown to increase HDL cholesterol over a longer period of time.
- **Other omega-3 fatty acids** such as flaxseed (ground, of course), soy foods, green leafy vegetables, and walnuts are all good sources of terrestrial omega-3 fatty acids.



- **Alcohol.** Yes, alcohol (particularly red wine) has been known to increase HDL cholesterol, in moderation only.
- **If you have elevated triglycerides, please do NOT use this method of increasing HDL cholesterol.**
- **Purple skinned fruits and juices** and some nuts may also have an effect of increasing HDL.
- **Weight loss** in overweight individuals will often decrease LDL and increase HDL cholesterol.
- For women, **estrogen replacement therapy** usually increases HDL cholesterol.

**There are several things that tend to suppress, or lower, HDL cholesterol. Modifying these behaviors will often quickly allow the beneficial HDL cholesterol to rise nicely:**

- **Decrease refined sugars and carbohydrates** in the diet. These are white sugar products, honey, white breads and pasta, in addition to the sweetened beverages we Americans tend to consume in excess. Find a sugar-free substitute, such as iced tea, seltzer water, fresh fruit, unbuttered popcorn or unsalted nuts, increase the fiber in your breads and pasta, or just eliminate most of those sweet nothings.



- **Quit smoking.** This will definitely increase your HDL levels while greatly reducing your risk of other diseases.
- Very low fat diets will lower HDL *as well as* LDL cholesterol. It is best to **include some beneficial fats** such as those found in fish, nuts, flax, avocados, and legumes (such as soy, kidney beans, chickpeas).

Sometimes, a temporary drop in HDL occurs when major changes have been made in the diet and total cholesterol has been lowered significantly. For most people, HDL levels will rise again if the diet changes are maintained. Try the suggestions listed above and see your HDL rise over the next few months. **Reach for your health potential!**

