

TOOLBOX TALKS

High Cholesterol? The Top 12 Non- Drug Strategies to Increase Your HDL Levels

Think of you've heard it all when it comes to cholesterol? Well in fact, in people with heart disease, the most common cholesterol problem is too little HDL. That's because HDL cholesterol works to remove LDL cholesterol from the arteries. "Even if their total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol levels are normal, people with reduced levels of HDL have an increased risk of coronary artery disease," says Richard N. Fogoros, M.D.

When HDL levels are increased, a little goes a long way. It's estimated that for every mg/dl increase in HDL cholesterol, there is a 2 percent to 4 percent decrease in your risk of coronary heart disease.

12 Strategies to Increase Your HDL

If your HDL levels are lacking, here are some key ways to boost them.

Exercise: Aerobic exercise, the kind that raises your heart rate for an extended period of time (say 20 or 30 minutes), can increase your HDL if done regularly. Examples include jogging, biking, fast walking, aerobics, etc.

Maintain a healthy weight: Being overweight or obese can increase your LDL cholesterol levels while reducing your HDL. Losing weight can help to increase HDL.

Don't eat trans fats:

Trans fats are unhealthy types of fat found in margarine, shortening, fried foods like french fries and fried chicken, doughnuts, cookies, pastries and crackers. Anything that contains hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oil also contains them.

These artery-clogging fats are known to increase LDL cholesterol and decrease HDL. Avoiding foods that contain them (you have to be diligent in reading labels to do so, as many processed products contain them) can help to raise your HDL levels significantly.

Eat more monounsaturated fats: Increasing foods that contain these healthy fats – olive oil, peanut butter, avocados, etc. – can help raise your HDL levels without harming your total cholesterol.

Eat soluble fiber: Fiber can increase your JDL cholesterol while decreasing the LDL. It's found in fruits like apples, oranges, pears, peaches, berries and grapes, seeds and nuts, oat bran, dried beans, oatmeal, barley, rye and vegetables. At least two servings a day is ideal.

Avoid processed carbs from white sugar, flour, potatoes, etc. those too can cause your blood sugar to rise. This has been linked to decreases in HDL levels.



*Increasing your HDL:
Another benefit exercise.*



Doughnuts, along with other foods that contain trans fats, are some of the worst foods you could eat: they lower your good cholesterol and increase the bad.



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Pile on the Onions: Research suggests that half of a raw onion a day may raise HDL levels by as much as 30 percent.

Drinking: One or two alcoholic drinks a day may help to increase HDL levels. An ideal choice may be red wine: "There are antioxidants contained in red wines such as cabernet sauvignon, merlot and pinot noir, that help slow down the oxidation of HDL and LDL cholesterol," says Vincent Rifici of the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. However, go over one or two drinks and you'll do more damage than good. Some people may experience problems with lesser amounts of alcohol as well.

Don't eliminate all fat from your diet: Just like too much fat in your diet can cause problems, too little fat in your diet can lead to a deficiency of essential fatty acids. It has also been linked to significant reductions in HDL cholesterol. For best results, eat a variety of healthy fats, like monounsaturated fats, and avoid the bad ones, like trans fats.

Quit Smoking: This will result in an increase in HDL levels.

Consider taking niacin: According to the National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP), niacin (vitamin B3) is an important tool to normalize cholesterol. Several studies have found that this vitamin can increase HDL by 30 percent while lowering total cholesterol by 10 percent to 25 percent.

Get lots of omega-3: This essential fatty acid, found in fish, fish oil, flaxseed and walnuts, has been found to increase HDL cholesterol.



Like Onions? Half of one a day can raise your HDL by 30 percent.



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