

Tips For Heart Healthy Living

Health Camp of New Jersey – Educational Article

If your lipids are not at healthy levels, there are things you can do to improve them—and your health profile. The first step to consider is making changes to your lifestyle. Eating more healthfully and exercising can improve your overall well-being and your heart health. If lifestyle changes are not enough, you may need to work with a healthcare provider to find medication, or a combination of medications, to help reach your lipid goals.

Below are some tips to get you started

Regular physical activity is one of the best ways to ensure a healthy heart. If you're overweight, losing 10 pounds can lower your LDL-C by as much as eight percent.

All healthy adults ages 18-65 should get at least 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week or at least five times per week. It sounds like a lot with today's busy schedules, but you'd be surprised at how easy it is with some small changes. And, the exercise doesn't have to be that strenuous either. Just walking your dog, mowing your lawn, gardening, walking upstairs instead of taking the elevator, or chasing after your kids (or grandkids) may be enough to get your heart rate up.

Outside of everyday activities to include brisk walking, swimming, cycling, jogging, skiing, jumping rope, aerobic dancing, and many other activities can be healthy for your heart.

If you've been inactive for a long time, are overweight, or have other health problems, make sure you see your doctor before beginning a physical activity program.

You should also try to follow a diet that is low in saturated and trans fats, cholesterol, added sugars and salt. You don't have to eliminate these foods from your diet entirely, just have a little less of them. Make reading food labels a habit. You'd be surprised by what's in some of the food you eat! Here are a few tips:

Limit foods containing partially hydrogenated vegetable oils to reduce trans fats in your diet. Instead, try olive oil. If you can keep your saturated fats to a minimum

(about seven percent of your diet), studies have shown you can decrease LDL-C by as much as 10 percent.

Cut back on foods high in dietary cholesterol like whole milk, shellfish, or "organ" meats, like liver. Replace them with skim milk and salmon. Some studies show this may lower your LDL-C by five percent.

Cut back on added sugars, like sucrose, glucose, and fructose. Try natural sugars like those found in fruits.

Finally, you should try to eat less than 2,300 mg (just over one teaspoon) of salt or sodium per day. People with high blood pressure should have less than 1,500 mg per day.

What are lipids?

Lipid is a medical term for fat found in the bloodstream. There are different types of lipids, some good and some bad. The two major types of lipids are cholesterol and triglycerides.

Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a waxy substance that provides your body with energy and is used to make hormones and bile acids necessary to help digest food. Cholesterol is made naturally by the body but is also taken in from some foods. Your body needs cholesterol to function properly, but having too much can cause a buildup of plaque in the arteries, which may lead to heart disease or stroke.

Cholesterol travels throughout the body in little packages called lipoproteins which are made up of blood fats called lipids and proteins. Two main types of lipoproteins carry cholesterol:

Low density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C)

LDL-C is known as the "bad" cholesterol because it carries cholesterol to tissues, including the arteries. You might think of LDL as being the bad "dump truck." LDL cholesterol is the amount of cholesterol fat circulating in your blood, which can be used to estimate the number of LDL dump trucks getting into the artery wall -- the

cause of plaque build-up and driving force behind atherosclerosis, heart disease and stroke.

Based on your risk for heart disease, your doctor will help you set an LDL-C goal. While lowering LDL-C is the main method for managing heart disease risk, it is important to keep your other lipids at a healthy level, too.

High density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C)

HDL-C is known as the "good" cholesterol because it helps take "bad" cholesterol out of the body. Think about HDL-C as a "tow truck" that removes LDL-C from your blood. The higher your HDL-C level, more "bad" cholesterol your body can remove. Research has shown that for every one mg/dL increase in HDL-C, your risk of a heart attack drops three to four percent. Because studies have shown that low HDL-C may be a greater risk factor for heart disease in women, guidelines for healthy HDL-C levels differ for men and women.

Triglycerides

Triglycerides are another type of lipid, or fat, found both in the blood and in foods. High triglycerides are often caused by being overweight, a lack of physical activity, cigarette smoking, excess alcohol intake, or a diet very high in carbohydrates—the sugars and starches found in bread, cereals, fruits, etc. When triglycerides are high, LDL-C no longer accurately estimates the number and risk of LDL "dump trucks." In this case, your doctor will try different ways of estimating your level of LDL-C, such as calculated non-HDL cholesterol (the sum of all cholesterol levels minus HDL-C), or advanced tests such as ApoB or NMR spectroscopy.

High levels of triglycerides have been linked to increased heart disease risk—particularly in women. Research shows that women with high triglycerides and a waist larger than 35 inches are three times more likely to die of heart disease than those without those risk factors. People with diabetes tend to have higher triglycerides than those without the condition. Diabetic patients also face greater risks if they have a high triglyceride count.

Total Cholesterol

Total cholesterol is the sum of all cholesterol in the blood. Even if your total cholesterol is below 200 mg/dL, you may still be at risk for heart disease if your individual lipid measures are not within recommended levels.

Why are healthy lipid levels important?

Unhealthy lipid levels can increase your risk of heart disease, the number one cause of death for American men and women. In fact, diseases of the heart alone cause more than 30 percent of all deaths in the U.S., many more than all cancers combined. The most dangerous of the heart diseases is atherosclerosis, or "hardening of the arteries." It's a buildup of the waxy deposits from cholesterol, called plaque, that can narrow your arteries and prevent oxygen from getting to your heart. This can lead to stroke, heart attack, and even death.

Medications

If lifestyle changes aren't enough to manage your lipid levels, your doctor may suggest medication. There are many different types of lipid disorders and many drugs to treat them, so make sure you work with your doctor to find that treatment that is right for you. The most commonly used medications to lower cholesterol, called statins, have been shown to lower the risk of heart disease by about 30 percent. Through a healthy lifestyle, and the addition of other medications such as fibrates, nicotinic acids, or bile acid resins, you may be able to further reduce your risk for heart disease.

Most lipid medications are extremely safe and have few if any side effects. Here are some basic questions you can ask your doctor to ensure the medication you get prescribed is right for you.

Tips for Talking with Your Doctor about Medication

You and your healthcare provider can work together to weigh the risks and benefits of taking medication and identify the right treatment plan for you. Consider asking your doctor the following questions about medication:

When and how should I take this medication?

What are the potential side effects of this medication?

Are there ways to deal with these side effects?

How will I know if the medication is working?

How long will I have to take this medication?

What should I do if I want to stop taking the medication?

Know your numbers

What are healthy lipid levels?

HDL-C (Good Cholesterol) > 40 mg/dL in men and > 50 mg/dL in women

LDL-C (Bad Cholesterol) < 100 mg/dL

Triglycerides < 150 mg/dL

Total Cholesterol < 200 mg/dL

Who is at Risk for Cardiovascular Disease?

Heart Disease Risk Factors

Factors you can't change

Age—45 or older for men; 55 or older for women

Family history of early heart disease—
father or brother diagnosed before 55;
mother or sister diagnosed before age 65

Factors you can change

Smoking

High blood pressure

High blood cholesterol

Overweight/obesity

Physical inactivity

Diabetes

Ten Diet and Lifestyle recommendations for preventing heart disease

Maintain a healthy weight. Weight gain/obesity is a risk factor for heart disease. Incorporate daily physical activity to raise your good (HDL) cholesterol levels and lower your LDL cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

1. Eat a balanced diet with whole grains, a variety of colorful fruits and
2. vegetables, a handful of nuts, low-fat dairy, and lean protein sources. Eat more plant-based vegetarian meals using legumes, beans, and soy foods for protein. Avoid processed foods or processed meats.
3. Control the portion sizes. Avoid oversized portions of meals. Choose healthier foods when dining out.
4. Decrease unhealthy fats, such as saturated and trans fats, which can raise the harmful (LDL) cholesterol and in turn increase the risk for heart disease. Avoid deep-fried foods and foods made with vanaspati ghee, cream, palm/palm kernel oil, and coconut oil.
5. Limit refined carbohydrates, especially sugar, sweets, desserts, and sugar-sweetened beverages such as sodas, mango lassi, sweet lassi, etc. Also, limit foods such as white bread or white rice. Foods with high amounts of refined carbohydrates can raise triglyceride levels. Elevated triglyceride levels are associated with heart disease.
6. Reduce salt intake in foods. Increased salt intake can lead to elevated blood pressure, which is a risk factor for heart attack and stroke. Eat whole, unprocessed foods to limit your salt intake. Flavor foods with herbs, spices, lemon and lime juice instead of salt.
7. Avoid whole milk. Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk and low-fat yogurt.
8. Incorporate more soluble or viscous fiber in your diet, which helps to lower the harmful (LDL) cholesterol. Foods high in soluble or viscous fiber include lentils, beans, oats, oat bran, broccoli, sweet potatoes, apples, pears, etc.
9. Choose mostly water instead of sweetened beverages. Stay well hydrated.
10. If you take alcohol, limit it to one drink or less per day for women and two drinks or less per day for men. Alcohol shows no additional benefit to protect against heart disease.