

# 11 Tips to Cut Your Cholesterol Fast

By Karyn Repinski

If you have high cholesterol, you're also at higher risk for heart disease. But the good news is, it's a risk you can control. You can lower your "bad" LDL cholesterol and raise your "good" HDL cholesterol. You just have to make some simple changes.

"I tell patients that you have to start somewhere and just keep going," says Suzanne Steinbaum, DO, an attending cardiologist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. "As you adopt lifestyle changes, everything starts shifting, and the improvements you see at 6 weeks often increase by 3 months."

You still may need to take medicine to get your cholesterol back on track. But if you make just a few, small changes, you might be able to lower your dose and chance of side effects.

Follow these tips to cut your cholesterol and get back on the road to good health.

## Ban Trans Fats

"They raise your LDL, lower your HDL, and increase your risk of developing heart disease and stroke," Steinbaum says. But it's hard to avoid them. They're found in fried foods, baked goods (cakes, pie crusts, frozen pizza, and cookies), and stick margarines.

That's why the FDA is taking steps to remove them from the food supply. How can you avoid them in the meantime? When you go shopping, read the labels. But be careful if you see "partially hydrogenated oil" on the package. That's just a fancy name for trans fat.

## Scale Back

You don't have to lose a lot of weight to lower your cholesterol. If you're overweight, drop just 10 pounds and you'll cut your LDL by up to 8%. But to really keep off the pounds, you'll have to do it over time. A reasonable and safe goal is 1 to 2 pounds a week. Eating plans that allow 1,000 to 1,200 calories a day will help most women lose weight safely. Plans with 1,200 to 1,600 calories a day are good for most men who want to lose weight.

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### Sources

SOURCES:  
Suzanne Steinbaum, DO, attending cardiologist and director of women's heart health, Lenox Hill Hospital, New York.  
American Heart Association: "Humor helps your heart? How?"  
FDA Consumer Updates: "FDA Cuts Trans Fat in Processed Foods."



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### Get Moving

"Exercising at least 2 1/2 hours a week is enough to raise HDL and improve LDL and triglycerides," says Sarah Samaan, MD, a cardiologist in Plano, TX. If you haven't been active, start slowly -- even 10-minute blocks of activity count. Choose an exercise you enjoy. And buddy up: An exercise partner can help keep you on track.

### Fill Up on Fiber

Foods like oatmeal, apples, prunes, and beans are high in soluble fiber, which keeps your body from absorbing cholesterol. Research shows that people who ate 5 to 10 more grams of it each day saw a drop in their LDL. Eating more fiber also makes you feel full, so you won't crave snacks as much. But beware: Too much fiber at one time can cause abdominal cramps or bloating. Increase your intake slowly.

### Go Fish

Try to eat it two to four times a week. "Not only are the omega-3 fats in fish heart-healthy, but replacing red meat with fish will lower your cholesterol by reducing your exposure to saturated fats, which are abundant in red meat," Samaan says. The catch? Some types, like shark, swordfish, and king mackerel, are high in mercury. That can increase your risk for heart disease. Instead, choose wild salmon, sardines, and bluefin tuna.

### Opt for Olive Oil

"Substituting olive oil for butter may reduce LDL cholesterol by as much as 15%, which is similar to the effect of a low dose of medication," Samaan says. The "good" fats in olive oil benefit your heart. Choose extra-virgin olive oil. It's less processed and contains more antioxidants, which help prevent disease.

### Go Nuts

Most types can lower LDL. The reason: They contain sterols, which, like fiber, keep the body from absorbing cholesterol, Steinbaum says. Just don't go overboard: Nuts are high in calories (an ounce of almonds packs 164!).

### Chill Out

Did you know that when you're stressed, your cholesterol can go through the roof? Relax. Get lost in a good book, meet a friend for coffee, or take to your yoga mat. It'll help keep your cholesterol in check.

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SOURCES:

Suzanne Steinbaum, DO, attending cardiologist and director of women's heart health, Lenox Hill Hospital, New York



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## Spice It Up

If you don't already dust your cappuccino with cinnamon or shake pepper on your pasta, listen up: Spices like garlic, curcumin, ginger, black pepper, coriander, and cinnamon do more than flavor your food, they can also improve cholesterol. Research shows that eating a half to one clove of garlic each day could lower cholesterol up to 9%. Bonus: Adding extra seasoning to your food also reduces your appetite, so it's easier to drop excess pounds, Steinbaum says.

## Butt Out

"Smoking can raise LDL and lower HDL, and quitting often improves those numbers," Samaan says. In one study, people who stopped smoking saw their "good" cholesterol rise 5% in one year. But if you're regularly around smokers, take heed: Breathing secondhand smoke every day can also raise levels of bad cholesterol.

## Laugh More

Laughter is like medicine: It increases HDL, Steinbaum says. Need to add some comic relief to your life? Check out silly pet videos online, sign up for a joke-a-day email, or watch funny movies.

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