

# Low HDL? Here's What You Can Do



*Regular exercise, a healthy diet, and not smoking can all increase your HDL level to protect against heart disease.*

**W**hen you have your cholesterol checked, different kinds of cholesterol may be measured. You may have heard that there's a good type and a bad type, but which is which? How can you know what to do to improve your overall health? Let's talk about the good type of cholesterol, otherwise known as "high density lipoprotein" or HDL. Your liver makes HDL cholesterol, which protects you against heart disease. It protects your heart by removing the bad type of cholesterol from the blood. (The bad type of cholesterol is known as "low density lipoprotein" or LDL cholesterol.)

## CHOLESTEROL: BAD VS. GOOD

**LDL** (bad) cholesterol: **COLLECTS** in the arteries and forms blockages that can cause heart disease.

**HDL** (good) cholesterol: **PROTECTS** against heart disease by helping the body get rid of LDL to keep arteries healthy.

The higher your level of HDL, the better since it helps get rid of LDL cholesterol. And this means that your arteries will be less likely to become clogged with harmful plaque buildup over time. The lower your level of HDL, the higher your risk of clogged arteries.

## If you smoke, consider this:

- Millions of people successfully quit smoking every year in the U.S.
- There are many ways to stop smoking—you can join a quit smoking program, call a quit smoking telephone helpline, or make a plan to quit on your own.
- Even if you have tried quitting before, it is important to keep at it. Many people make a few attempts before they stop for good.
- Most people who try to stop smoking will succeed.
- Smoking harms your health and the health of anyone who inhales the smoke secondhand. If you have not yet quit, limit how much you expose others to your cigarette smoke.

## How can you increase your HDL level?

The level of HDL in your blood may be influenced by your family's genes and health history. But there are still many things that you can do to help increase your good cholesterol.

- If you are overweight, try to lose weight. Losing as little as 10 pounds can help.
- If you smoke, quit now. Smoking lowers HDL. Kaiser Permanente can help you stop smoking. Visit or call your local Health Education Center for more information on stop smoking programs.

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- Exercise regularly. Start with 10 minutes of daily physical activity, like walking, bicycling or swimming. Work up to at least 30 minutes of exercise each day. Check with your doctor or other medical professional before starting any strenuous exercise program.
- Eat fish twice a week. Salmon, herring, trout, mackerel, water-packed albacore tuna, and water-packed sardines are good sources of omega-3 fatty acids.
- Eat a heart-healthy, high fiber diet. Whole-grain foods, fruits, and vegetables provide fiber.
- When using fat in your diet, use monounsaturated fats, such as those found in olive oil, canola oil, avocados, and walnuts.

## Physical activity and weight loss

If you're concerned about reaching a healthy weight, increasing your physical activity is one of the most important steps you can take to lose weight and to keep it off.

How does physical activity help with weight loss? First, when you exercise, your body burns more calories. Second, exercising helps your body build more muscle. The more muscle you have, the more calories your body uses all day, every day. Remember, though,

muscle weighs more than fat. So, as you become fit and your body fat is replaced with muscle, you may not see the improvement as a weight loss on a scale. But if you stick with it and keep eating a heart-healthy diet, smaller portions, and less high-calorie food, you will become trimmer and probably see a difference in the way your clothes fit. You'll also feel better, have more energy, and you may even lose some weight.

### Health benefits of physical activity:

- Helps you replace fat with lean muscle (helps you look trimmer)
- Increases bone strength
- Increases resistance to stress and illness
- Decreases blood pressure
- Reduces risk of heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, hypertension, and some cancers
- Increases the level of HDL cholesterol and decreases LDL cholesterol level
- Increases heart and lung strength
- Improves sleep
- Increases metabolism—helps maintain lean body mass
- Decreases appetite
- Burns calories
- Helps your body burn fat
- Motivates healthy eating
- Reduces stress and boredom

## What if these changes don't increase your HDL level?

If diet and lifestyle changes don't improve your HDL level, discuss this with your doctor or other health care professional. If needed, medications may be prescribed to help increase your HDL level.

### Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at [kp.org](http://kp.org) to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, Healthy Living classes, and much more.
- Call your Health Education Department to learn more about Kaiser Permanente's quit smoking programs or visit [kp.org/quitsmoking](http://kp.org/quitsmoking).
- Call quit smoking telephone helplines available locally, such as the California Smoker's Helpline (1-800-766-2888).
- American Lung Association 1-800-LUNG-USA
- Nicotine Anonymous at [nicotine-anonymous.org](http://nicotine-anonymous.org)

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.