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Lifestyle Changes to Control Cholesterol

You can control your cholesterol through diet, exercise, weight management, quitting smoking, stress management, and taking your medicines right. These things can also lower your risk for cardiovascular disease.



Eating healthy

Your healthcare provider will give you information on diet changes you may need to make. Your provider may recommend that you see a registered dietitian for help with diet changes. Changes may include:

- Cutting back on the amount of fat and cholesterol in your meals
- Eating less salt (sodium). This is especially important if you also have high blood pressure.
- Eating more fresh vegetables and fruits
- Eating lean proteins such as fish, poultry, beans, and peas
- Eating less red meat and processed meats
- Using low-fat dairy products
- Using vegetable and nut oils in limited amounts
- Limiting how many sweets and processed foods like chips, cookies, and baked goods that you eat
- Limiting how many sugar-sweetened beverages you drink
- Limiting how often you eat out
- Limiting alcohol

Getting exercise

Regular exercise is a good way to help your body control cholesterol. Regular exercise can help in many ways. It can:

- Raise your good cholesterol
- Help lower your bad cholesterol
- Let blood flow better through your body
- Give more oxygen to your muscles and tissues
- Help you manage your weight

- Help your heart pump better
- Lower your blood pressure

Your healthcare provider may recommend that you get more physical activity if you haven't been active. Your provider may recommend that you get moderate to vigorous physical activity for at least 40 minutes each day. You should do this for at least 3 to 4 days each week. A few examples of moderate to vigorous activity are:

- Walking at a brisk pace. This is about 3 to 4 miles per hour.
- Jogging or running
- Swimming or water aerobics
- Hiking
- Dancing
- Martial arts
- Tennis
- Riding a bicycle or stationary bike
- Dancing

Managing your weight

If you are overweight or obese, your healthcare provider will work with you to help you lose weight and lower your BMI (body mass index). Making diet changes and getting more physical activity can help. Changing your diet will help you lose weight more easily than adding exercise.

Quitting smoking

Smoking and other tobacco use can raise cholesterol and make it harder to control. Quitting is tough. But millions of people have given up tobacco for good. You can quit, too! Think about some of the reasons below to quit smoking. Do any of them make you think twice about your smoking habit?

Stop smoking because it:

- Keeps your cholesterol high, even if you make all the other changes you're supposed to
- Damages your body. It especially harms your heart, lungs, skin, and blood vessels.
- Makes you more likely to have a heart attack (acute myocardial infarction), stroke, or cancer
- Stains your teeth
- Makes your skin, clothes, and breath smell bad
- Costs a lot of money

Ask your healthcare provider for medicines or nicotine replacement products to help you quit.

Controlling stress

Learn ways to control stress. This will help you deal with stress in your home and work life. Controlling stress can greatly lower your risk of getting cardiovascular disease.

Making the most of medicines

Healthy eating and exercise are a good start to keeping your cholesterol down. But you may need some extra help from medicine. If your doctor prescribes medicine, be sure to take it exactly as directed.

Remember:

- Tell your healthcare provider about all other medicines you take. This includes vitamins and herbs.
- Tell your healthcare provider if you have any side effects after starting to take a medicine. Examples of side effects to watch for include muscle aches, weakness, blurred vision, rust-colored urine, yellowing of eyes or skin (jaundice), abdominal pain, and headache.
- Don't skip a dose or stop taking your medicine because you feel better or because your cholesterol numbers go down. Never stop taking your medicine unless your healthcare provider has told you it's OK.
- Ask your healthcare provider if you have any questions about your medicines.

Risk groups

Some people may need to take medicines called statins to control their cholesterol. This is in addition to eating a healthy diet and getting regular exercise. The dose or intensity of the statin depends on your risk factors.

Statins can help you stay healthy. They can also help prevent a heart attack or stroke. You may need to take a statin if you are in one of the intermediate, high, or very-high risk groups or if you have a multiple risk (enhancers) conditions.

Calculating a risk score is done looking at certain risk factors that are considered as an increased risk for atherosclerosis. The risk calculator tool looks at:

- Ages between 40-79 years of age
- Gender
- Race
- Blood pressure (systolic and diastolic measurements)
- Total cholesterol, good cholesterol (HDL), and bad cholesterol (LDL) levels
- History of diabetes
- Current or past smoking history
- Treatment for high blood pressure
- Treatment of cholesterol with a statin
- Current use of aspirin

If you are uncertain about your risk factors, you and your provider may decide to proceed with a scan to determine a coronary artery calcium (CAC) score. Depending on the results of this scan you and your provider may decide on whether starting a medicine for cholesterol is the best treatment option for you.

Talk with your healthcare provider about your treatment goals. Make sure you understand why these goals are important, based on your own health history and your family history of heart disease or high cholesterol.

Make a plan to have regular cholesterol checks. You may need to fast before getting this test. Also ask your provider about any side effects your medicines may cause. Let your provider know about any side effects you have. You may need to take more than one medicine to reach the cholesterol goals that you and your provider decide on.

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