

## The Good and Bad of Cholesterol

Cholesterol itself isn't bad. Actually, cholesterol plays an important role in building cells, digestion, and hormone manufacturing. However, since cholesterol is a waxy substance much like a can of Crisco you purchase at the grocery store, the problem occurs when there is excess cholesterol in the body and thus, it begins to build up in the arteries, straining the heart.

Cholesterol comes from two places: your liver and the foods you eat. Interestingly enough, cholesterol is only made by animals, so you only get cholesterol from eating meats and not plant-based foods.

There are two types of cholesterol: high-density lipoprotein (HDL) and low-density lipoprotein (LDL). American Heart Association explained their roles best: LDL cholesterol is like someone who carries stuff all through the house and drops it along the way while HDL cholesterol is like someone who picks up the dropped stuff and puts it away to keep the house from becoming impassable. Without HDL cholesterol, LDL would eventually lead to completely blocked arteries.

Since high cholesterol levels usually show no symptoms, it's important to have your levels checked by your family physician. MedBen WellLiving recommends a screening every five years (unless your physician recommends otherwise) based on risk factors such as age, sex, family history, smoking history, diabetes and blood pressure. Screenings are simple and require just a small sample of blood.



### Increase the Good Cholesterol

Your HDL levels should be higher than your LDL levels. Here's how to increase HDL.

- HDL levels are measured in milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per deciliter (dL). 60 mg/dL or greater is optimal for both men and women. At risk levels for men is less than 40 mg/dL and less than 50 mg/dL for women.
- Increase your HDL levels by working out 30-60 minutes most day of the week.
- Quit smoking! Researchers found that a toxic chemical in cigarettes lowered HDL levels.
- Include sources of omega-3 fatty acids in your diet.
- Eat high-fiber fruit, like prunes, apples, and pears!
- Always consult your family physician before adding supplements to your diet.

SOURCES: Mayo Clinic, American Heart Association, Everydayhealth.com, Health Line