



CAPE COD COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Raising your Level of HDL (High Density Lipoprotein- “healthy cholesterol”)

THE GOAL: HDL levels are considered “normal” if they are between 40 and 60 mg/dL. HDL levels >60 mg/dL may offer further protection from heart disease.

FACTS: Like LDL (the “Lousy cholesterol”), HDL is not actually a component of food. It is made by the body and may be genetically determined. The

GOOD NEWS: we can influence the formation of either LDL or HDL by making positive choices in our **FOOD CHOICES** and **EXERCISE**.

WHY INCREASE YOUR HDL LEVELS?

Most heart and blood vessel disease is caused by a buildup of cholesterol, plaque and other fatty deposits in artery walls. If they get too clogged, the blood flow is reduced. This can result in heart attack or stroke, depending on where the blockage occurs. In general, the higher the HDL, the better at reducing this risk.

LIFESTYLE CHOICES TO INCREASE HDL LEVELS

- Physical activity. Aerobic exercise, where your heart rate is raised for 20-30 minutes at a time, may be the most effective at increasing HDL levels. Examples are walking fast, jogging, bike riding, etc.
- Achieve a healthy weight. Even a moderate weight loss of 5-10 pounds can lower LDL levels and raise HDL levels. This may be especially true if your weight is stored in your abdominal area.
- Stop smoking. Quitting smoking will increase HDL levels while decreasing the risk of heart disease.

COOKING TIPS FOR ACHIEVING HEALTHY CHOLESTEROL LEVELS

- Broil or grill instead of pan-frying meat, fish and poultry.
- Use a rack to drain off fat when you broil, roast or bake.
- Cut off visible fat before cooking and remove skin from poultry.
- Use vegetable spray, canola or olive oil to sauté foods instead of butter.
- Change your plate: fill at least half of your plate with vegetables and salads and smaller amounts of higher fat food items.
- Opt for low-fat cheeses and dairy products and use eggs in moderation to keep dietary fat to a minimum.



Cape Cod Cooperative Extension: Barnstable County, UMass Extension and USDA cooperating. Barnstable County and UMass Extension offer equal opportunity in programs and employment.

DIETARY CHOICES THAT MAY HELP TO INCREASE HDL LEVELS

- Cut the trans fatty acids. Many prepared and processed foods contain trans fats. Read the label! If you see partially hydrogenated vegetable oils on the ingredient list, those are the trans fats.



- Replace saturated and trans fats with monounsaturated fats. Using canola oil and olive oil, natural nut oils and fats in avocados can increase HDL levels without increasing total cholesterol. Flax seed and soy are also sources of healthy fats. If you use margarine, use a spreadable “tub” type.

- Eat fish. Cold water fish, like salmon, mackerel, sardines, light tuna and fish oil supplements contain Omega 3 fatty acids and may increase HDL.



- Increase your fiber intake. Refined carbohydrates may suppress or lower HDL. Use whole grain cereals and breads, brown and wild rice, oatmeal, beans and legumes to get 25 or more grams of fiber per day.

- Eat your fruits and vegetables! Make a rainbow on your plate with a variety of choices. Different colors may offer protection from some types of cancer, and fresh, frozen and canned fruits and vegetables have natural soluble fiber.

SOME OTHER DIETARY OPTIONS FOR INCREASING HDL LEVELS

There have been studies showing the benefit of drinking cranberry juice and orange juice or eating oranges to increase HDL levels. Some studies indicate a potential increase in HDL with calcium supplementation for post-menopausal women. Niacin, a type of Vitamin B, has been used, but should be discussed with your physician due to side effects of its use. Alcohol, particularly red wine, may help with HDL levels, but moderation is key. One to two drinks a day may be beneficial, but remember that a drink is only 5 oz. of wine, one 12 oz. beer or 1.5 oz. of distilled spirits. Too much alcohol can result in high fat levels in the blood and lead to other health related issues. Alcohol use is not for everyone, and may contribute to “empty calories”, so other lifestyle measures such as weight loss, exercise and smoking cessation may be more effective and provide fewer risks.

Adapted from “How Can I Lower High Cholesterol” by American Heart Association, 10/07, “Raising your HDL Levels” by Richard N. Fogoros, MD, 11/07 and “Raising your Level of HDL” from UMass Medical School, Department of Behavioral Medicine.