

Cholesterol - Know Your Numbers and How You Are Trending

By Jean Huelsing RN (Founder of Camp Jump Start®)

This is national cholesterol education month. And while the topic is a little confusing to the average person, scientists and health professionals from around the world agree that the best way to lower your risks for cardiovascular disease is to lower your cholesterol.

So what is cholesterol? It is a waxy fatlike substance. And here is where it can get a little confusing. There is a bad kind and a good kind and the relationship between the two is important. The “lousy” cholesterol called LDL—(Low-density Lipoprotein) cannot dissolve in blood so it is the bad guy that makes plaque in blood vessels which leads to vessel blockages and causes heart attacks. Low levels of LDL is a good thing. Striving for LDL levels of 100 and below is good but dropping to 80 and lower may be the best. (And those with diabetes and heart disease really should aim for 70 and below.) Here is where the “good” cholesterol comes in. HDL—(High-density Lipoprotein) carries LDL cholesterol back to the liver for removal from the body. HDL is influenced by lifestyle mainly and it acts like a garbage truck collecting all the “lousy” cholesterol it can hold. So higher levels of HDL act like a larger garbage truck getting rid of the LDL garbage which keeps the plaque from building up in the blood vessels. So high HDL is ideal but if the LDL is exceptionally low then this is good too. The garbage trucks are not in demand when there is no garbage!

Along with cholesterol, triglycerides are another blood level checked in a lipid panel taken through a blood stick. Triglycerides make up the largest proportion of fats but only a small portion of triglycerides should be in our blood. Triglycerides will become elevated immediately following a fatty meal and this helps contribute to clogging of the arteries in people with high cholesterol.

So how long does it take to lower your cholesterol naturally a day, a month, a year or is it just impossible? Seriously, you have the power to reverse the path you are on in less than a month and you can do it without prescription medicine and all the side effects and complications associated with those drugs. The most important part of knowing your numbers is to watch the progression of your blood’s lab values because if you are trending upwards....you may still be fine this year but in fact, be heading for trouble. So be aware and take your own control today.

Baby steps to better numbers is doable—

First-- shed those extra pounds. Excess weight adversely affects your health in multiple areas. Every pound lost will definitely improve your blood cholesterol profile and prevent or delay cardiovascular incidents.

Second-- you need to decrease saturated fat and cholesterol in your diet and eliminate the partially hydrogenated (trans fat) completely. Animal products and bakery goods are loaded with these.

Third-- eat legumes instead of meat. Legumes include lentils, peas and beans. Legumes will lower LDL cholesterol and total cholesterol. Nuts and seeds will do the same thing but be careful as they are high in calories.

Fourth-- you should increase the soluble fiber in your diet. Fruits, vegetables, beans, oats and barley will do a good job moving your food along in the process of digestion.

Fifth-- increase plant sterols in your diet by increasing your consumption of wheat germ, wheat bran, peanuts, almonds and brussel sprouts which are great sources of plant sterols. Sterols act as sponges which sop up the extra cholesterol.

And finally, add psyllium to your diet. Psyllium husks are seed grains which are sold as a soluble fiber supplement or laxative. Take one teaspoon of psyllium 15 minutes before a meal to get the best LDL lowering results.

*Always check with your doctor if you have a concern about medications and supplements.

TRY THESE TIPS TO LOWER YOUR CHOLESTEROL AND IF YOUR BLOOD LEVELS ARE STILL TOO HIGH THEN TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT MEDICATIONS. REMEMBER THE BEST HEALTH CARE IS SELF-CARE!

According to nutritional scientists the suggested IDEAL numbers are listed below. Unfortunately, various numbers are used to scale cholesterol and acceptable levels have increased which is a sign of the times. Very few people are normal anymore! What is important to you is that you start tracking your numbers!

	☺	☹
LDL	< 100 prefer less than 80	> than 160 Increased risk over 130
HDL	>60	<50 for women <40 for men
Triglycerides	<150 Prefer <100	Increased risk over 200
Total Cholesterol	<150	>200
Total Cholesterol/ HDL	<3	>6

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