

The Balancing Act

Tips to Balance Your Life and Keep You Emotionally and Physically Fit



KEEPING CHOLESTEROL IN CHECK

When it comes to cholesterol many of us have heard the warnings, and we're aware of the toll high cholesterol, otherwise known as inflated Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) or "bad" cholesterol level can take on our bodies. What we may not be as aware of are the day-to-day changes we can make to keep LDL cholesterol levels at bay, and in turn reduce our risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and possibly even Alzheimer's disease.

Arm yourself with the knowledge you need and keep your cholesterol in check by:

Getting tested.

A simple blood test can help you know where your cholesterol levels are so you can map out an appropriate plan of action. Because there are usually no symptoms of high cholesterol, many people don't find out they have the condition until a major health crisis (e.g. a heart attack). Take a preventative approach: talk to your doctor about getting your LDL (or the "bad" cholesterol) and HDL (high-density lipoprotein a.k.a. the "good" cholesterol) levels checked out every few years. While many people think high cholesterol is only a concern later on in life, most doctors recommend starting testing in your 20's.

Recognizing your risks.

There are both manageable and uncontrollable factors that may put you at greater risk for developing high cholesterol. Uncontrollable aspects include: a family history of high cholesterol, age (the older you are, the more at risk you are) and gender (post-menopausal women in general are more likely to have high cholesterol). Diet, exercise and weight are all considered important factors that can be managed. Some studies also suggest shift workers tend to have higher cholesterol levels than the general population. Therefore, if you tend to work long shifts, you may need to be more vigilant about managing the factors you *can* control.

Exercising.

If maintaining a healthy weight, boosting your mood, shedding stress and improving your quality of sleep aren't reason enough to get active, consider this: regular physical exercise—especially aerobic exercise—has been shown to help reduce LDL or "bad" cholesterol levels and increase HDL or "good" cholesterol. Whether it's walking, indoor soccer or swimming a few times a week, choosing an activity or sport you enjoy will give you something to look forward to and encourage you to stick with it. Remember, it's always smart to consult a physician before starting a new exercise program.

Trimming the fat and cholesterol.

Maintain healthy LDL levels by limiting the amount of cholesterol, saturated fat and trans fat you eat. The American Heart Association recommends no more than 35 per cent of your total diet comes from fat, seven per cent from saturated fat and less than one per cent from trans fats. Aside from reading labels more carefully, simple steps to lower your cholesterol, saturated and trans fat intake include:

- Switching to low fat milk products (1 per cent or less)
- Limiting your amount of cheese, egg yolks and red meat and choosing leaner options when you do eat them
- Cooking with polyunsaturated or monounsaturated oils such as sunflower, safflower, olive or canola instead of butter or hydrogenated margarines.

Eating smarter.

Studies suggest there are a host of heart smart foods that not only taste great but can also cut LDL or “bad” cholesterol levels. These include:

- **Nuts:** especially hazelnuts, pecan, pistachios and walnuts
- **Soluble fiber:** found in fruits, vegetables, beans and grains. Oatmeal, in particular, has been shown to reduce LDL cholesterol by as much as 10 per cent when eaten regularly
- **Blueberries and grapes** both contain pterostilbene, which scientists believe can help reduce cholesterol levels.



Get a helping hand.

Depending on your risk factors, your doctor may recommend one of the several prescription medications available—in combination with a diet and exercise plan—to more effectively lower your LDL blood cholesterol levels. If this is the case, be sure to discuss the possible side effects with your doctor.

By consciously monitoring and managing—with the help of diet and exercise—your cholesterol levels, you’ll look and feel better, inside and out. So the next time you think about skipping out on that cholesterol check remember: taking a proactive approach to your cholesterol isn’t just a good idea—it’s one that can add years to your life.

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