

HDL - GOOD CHOLESTEROL! (OXYMORON, RIGHT?)



No! Cholesterol isn't all bad! In fact, cholesterol is an essential fat.

Cholesterol provides stability in every cell of your body. HDL cholesterol is the well-behaved “good cholesterol.” This *friendly scavenger* cruises the bloodstream and **removes harmful bad cholesterol (LDL)**. High HDL levels reduce the risk for **cardiovascular disease**—but low levels increase the risk. That’s because the lower the good – the higher the bad!

HDL is short for high-density lipoprotein. The HDL cholesterol particle is dense compared to other types of cholesterol particles, so it’s called “high-density”. Think of a strong, toned, taut body (HDL) vs a lazy, fat, flabby body (LDL). In order to travel through the bloodstream, cholesterol has to be transported by “helper molecules” called lipoproteins. Each lipoprotein has its own preferences for cholesterol, and acts differently with the cholesterol it carries.

HDL CHOLESTEROL ACTS IN A VARIETY OF WAYS THAT WORK TO REDUCE THE RISK FOR HEART DISEASE:

- HDL cholesterol scavenges and removes LDL – or “bad” – cholesterol.
- HDL reduces, reuses, and recycles LDL cholesterol by transporting it to the liver where it can be reprocessed.
- HDL cholesterol acts as a maintenance crew for the inner walls (endothelium) of blood vessels.

Damage to the inner walls is the first step in the process of vascular disease, which causes heart attacks and strokes. **HDL scrubs** the wall clean and keeps the artery healthy!

A lipid panel (lab test) tells the level of HDL cholesterol, but what do the numbers mean?

- HDL cholesterol levels >60 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL) are quite high. And that is a good thing!!
- HDL cholesterol levels <40 mg/dL are a bit low. That’s not so good.

In general, people with **higher HDL are at lower risk for heart disease**. People with low HDL are at higher risk. If the HDL is low, several steps can help to boost that level:

With high LDL (bad) cholesterol, you may develop fatty deposits in your blood vessels. Eventually, these deposits make it difficult for enough blood to flow through your arteries. Your heart may not get much oxygen-rich blood as it needs; this increases the **risk of a heart attack**.

Decreased blood flow to your brain can **cause a stroke**. High cholesterol can be inherited, but it’s often the result of **unhealthy lifestyle** choices, and thus preventable and treatable. It has no symptoms. A healthy diet and regular exercise can go a long way toward improving your cholesterol. A blood test is the only way to detect cholesterol levels.

Inspiring Passion for Life with Health & Hope for the Glory of God.

STEPS TO BOOST YOUR HDL LEVELS:

Exercise. Aerobic exercise for 30 to 60 minutes on most days of the week can help increase HDL.

Quit smoking. Tobacco smoke lowers HDL, and quitting can increase HDL levels.

Keep a healthy weight. Besides improving HDL levels, avoiding obesity reduces risk for heart disease and multiple other health conditions.

Minimize “empty carbs”, especially high-sugar foods, and foods made with refined grains such as

- White flour, white rice and
- White pasta, which tend to reduce HDL production.

Add HDL-raising foods to your diet, like

- Plums, red grapes, purple cabbage,
- Eggplant, raspberries, lots of fish, avocados,
- Olive oil, ground flax seed, and nuts.

And (ahh, yes!) add a little dark chocolate to your diet—not too much, just about 1 ounce per day, 70% cocoa or greater. This has been shown to improve the antioxidant effects of HDL and generally just makes you happy!