

7 Steps to Lowering Cholesterol

Step
1

Understand cholesterol



Cholesterol is a type of fat with important jobs to do in the body, like forming the walls of cells, making vitamin D, hormones, and bile which helps digest fat. But having too much cholesterol in the blood can clog up the arteries and lead to diseases of the heart and blood vessels, which can cause a heart attack or stroke, collectively known as cardiovascular disease (CVD).

Step
2

Know your numbers



The only way to know if you have healthy levels of cholesterol is to get a cholesterol test done. Talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist to arrange this.

Cholesterol can't travel in the blood on its own, it's carried in little parcels of fats and proteins called 'lipoproteins'. There are two main types, known as LDL and HDL.

- **LDL cholesterol** is sometimes known as 'bad cholesterol' because too much can clog up your arteries.
- **HDL cholesterol** is sometimes known as 'good cholesterol' because it carries excess cholesterol to your liver to be broken down.
- Another type of blood fat called **triglyceride** should be tested, as having a higher triglyceride level can also increase your risk of CVD

Find out more at www.heartuk.org.uk/cholesterol/understanding-your-cholesterol-test-results-



Step
3

See where you can take action



A number of things can raise your cholesterol and triglycerides which you can change: an unhealthy diet – eating too much saturated fat and not enough fibre – alcohol, being overweight and not being physically active.

See how healthy your diet is with our Diet Quiz at www.heartuk.org.uk/quizzes/all-quizzes

Can you see where you can live a healthier lifestyle? If so, ask yourself these questions to help you prepare to make changes: What would motivate you to make changes? Is anything getting in your way? What could you do to overcome those barriers?



Other things can raise your blood fats including certain medical conditions such as an underactive thyroid, your genes, getting older, and in women the menopause.

Step 4

Start making changes to your diet



- **Swap saturated fats** (such as butter, full fat dairy and fatty meats) for healthier, **unsaturated fats** (such as olive oil, avocados, nuts and seeds).
- **Swap refined carbs** (such as white bread and pasta) for **wholegrains** such as wholemeal bread and wholegrain breakfast cereals.
- Eat plenty of fibre from fruits, vegetables, wholegrains and pulses.
- Add in some foods which actively help lower cholesterol: **foods fortified with plant sterols and stanols** such as fat spreads i.e. ProActiv, certain yoghurts and mini yogurt drinks; **oats and barley; nuts and soya.**

Step 5

Get savvy with some practical diet hacks



- Start small with just one or two changes and build up from there.
- Set realistic goals, write them down, and plan how to achieve them.
- Get savvy with shopping – make meal plans, write shopping lists, and check the labels – to help you stay on track.
- Be aware of why you're eating and when – keeping a food diary can help you spot when you're eating because you're hungry or for other reasons.

Step 6

Don't forget about exercise



Being active is a major part of looking after your cholesterol levels and keeping your heart healthy. You don't have to join a gym, everyday activities such as gardening, brisk walking, and even dancing all count.

Step 7

Keep going!



Healthy eating is not about eating the perfect diet all the time – it's what you do most of the time that counts. Remember, it takes time to change habits, and rather than thinking about what you can't have, focus on the things you can.

For some people, a healthy diet and lifestyle might not be enough and you might need medication which you will need to take as prescribed – but keep going with the healthy lifestyle as this will keep you healthy in other ways too.

Lowering cholesterol, saving lives.
Together, we can make a big difference.

Find out more

You can find out more on all these steps at www.heartuk.org.uk, as well as watch the video on **Understanding Your Cholesterol**

watch our video on <https://www.heartuk.org.uk/cholesterol/animation>



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