

# Low HDL? Here's What You Can Do



*The higher your level of HDL cholesterol, the more LDL cholesterol will be removed. And this means that your arteries will be less likely to become clogged with harmful plaque buildup over time.*

**H**ave you ever become confused about your cholesterol? You may have heard that there's a good type and a bad type, but which is which? How can you know what to do so that your overall health is improved?

The information discussed here is about the good type of cholesterol, otherwise known as "high density lipoproteins." This is often written simply as "HDL" cholesterol. HDL cholesterol is made by your liver and protects you against heart disease. It protects your heart by removing the bad type of cholesterol from the blood. (The bad type of cholesterol is known as "low density lipoproteins," and is often written as "LDL" cholesterol.) The higher your level of HDL, the more LDL cholesterol will be removed. And this means that your arteries will be less likely to become clogged with harmful plaque buildup over time.

If your HDL is below 45, you have a higher risk for developing heart disease.

## What can you do to increase your HDL level?

The level of HDL in your blood may be influenced by your family's genetics. However, there are still a number of things that you can do to help increase your good cholesterol.

- If you are overweight, try to lose weight. Losing as little as 10 pounds can help.

- Exercise regularly. Start with 10 minutes of daily physical activity, like walking, bicycling or swimming. Work up to at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days. Check with your doctor or other medical professional before starting any strenuous exercise program.
- If you smoke, quit now. Smoking lowers HDL levels. Kaiser Permanente can help you stop smoking. Visit or call your local Health Education center for more information on stop smoking programs.

### If you smoke, consider this:

- More than a million people successfully quit smoking every year in the U.S.
- There are many ways to stop smoking—you can join a quit smoking program, call a quit smoking telephone helpline, or make a plan to quit on your own.
- Even if you have tried quitting before, it is important to keep at it. Many smokers make a few attempts before they stop for good.
- Most people who try to stop smoking eventually succeed.
- Smoking harms your health and the health of anyone who inhales your secondhand smoke. To limit others' exposure to smoke before you quit, smoke outside, wear a jacket while smoking, and remove it before going back inside.



- Eat fish twice a week. Salmon, herring, trout, mackerel, water-packed albacore tuna, and water-packed sardines are good sources of omega-3 fatty acids.
- Eat a low fat, high fiber diet. Whole-grain foods, fruits, and vegetables provide fiber. When using fat in your diet, use monounsaturated fats, such as those found in olive oil, canola oil, avocados, and walnuts.

## Physical activity and weight loss

If you're concerned about your weight, increasing your physical activity is one of the most important steps you can take to lose weight and to keep it off.

How does physical activity help with weight loss? First, when you exercise, your body burns more calories. Second, exercising helps your body build more muscle. Muscle, in turn, burns more calories than fat. So, the more muscle you have, the more calories your body uses all day, every day. Remember, though, muscle weighs more than fat. So, as you become fit and your body fat is replaced with muscle, you may not see the improvement as a weight loss on a scale. But if you stick with it and keep eating a healthy, low-calorie diet, you will become trimmer and probably see a difference in the way your clothes fit. You'll also feel better, and you may even lose some weight.

## What if these changes don't increase your HDL level?

If diet and lifestyle changes don't improve your HDL level, discuss this with your medical professional. If needed, medications may be prescribed to help increase your HDL level.

### Health benefits of physical activity

- Helps you replace fat with lean muscle (helps you look trimmer)
- Increases bone strength
- Increases resistance to stress and illness
- Decreases blood pressure
- Reduces risk of heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, hypertension, and some cancers
- Increases the level of good cholesterol and decreases total cholesterol level
- Increases heart and lung strength
- Improves sleep
- Increases metabolism—helps maintain lean body mass
- Decreases appetite
- Burns calories
- Promotes fat burning
- Motivates healthy eating
- Reduces stress and boredom

## Other resources

- Call your Health Education Department to learn more about Kaiser Permanente's quit smoking programs and free, quit smoking telephone helplines available locally, such as the California Smoker's Helpline (1-800-766-2888)
- American Lung Association 1-800-LUNG-USA
- Nicotine Anonymous at [www.nicotine-anonymous.org](http://www.nicotine-anonymous.org)
- Connect to our Web site at [members.kp.org](http://members.kp.org)
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor.