

Psyllium: Lower Your Cholesterol



Lowering your cholesterol protects you from heart attacks and stroke. Losing weight, being more physically active, and making certain changes to your diet all help lower cholesterol. Your doctor also may suggest that you take psyllium in addition to having a healthy lifestyle.

How does psyllium work?

Psyllium is an excellent source of soluble fiber. Soluble fiber helps lower cholesterol. When you take 10 grams of psyllium a day, you may reduce your cholesterol by 5 to 10 percent. You do not need a prescription to buy psyllium. *Metamucil* and *Konsyl* are common brand names. You also may buy it as “psyllium husk” or “refined psyllium hydrophilic mucilloid.” Insoluble fiber, such as wheat bran or *Citrucel*, is not the same thing and does not lower cholesterol.

What problems could I have taking psyllium?

Most people who take psyllium do not have any problems. Some people have:

- gas
- more frequent bowel movements
- skin rash or itching
- difficulty swallowing (the feeling of a lump in the throat)
- intestinal blockage

To avoid these side effects:

- Gradually increase the amount of psyllium you take over one to three weeks until you are up to about 10 grams per day.
- Do not take psyllium dry.
- Drink plenty of fluids; water is best. Drink at least six to eight 8-ounce glasses of liquid each day.

Will taking psyllium affect my other medications?

Psyllium may interfere with your body’s ability to absorb other drugs, including vitamins. To prevent this, take other medications and vitamins one hour before or two hours after taking psyllium.

How should I take psyllium?

Psyllium comes in several forms. The most common types are capsules, powder, wafers and cereals. The amount of psyllium that you get in each form depends on the specific product. For example, capsules may have 2 grams of psyllium in 6 capsules, and the label may say to take up to 6 capsules, three times each day. Bran Buds cereal has a mix of insoluble and psyllium fibers, with 3 grams of psyllium in a 1/3 cup serving.

It is important to read the label to know how much psyllium a certain product contains, and exactly how and when to take it. If you are not

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sure, talk with your doctor or other health care provider about how much to take.

When taking psyllium powder, always mix it with 6 to 8 ounces of liquid. Never take it dry. If you are taking cholesterol-lowering resins (*Colestid* or *Questran*), you may mix the psyllium in the same glass with the resin.

One dose of psyllium can be either one teaspoon or one tablespoon, depending on the product. Read the label to be sure.

When you begin taking psyllium, follow these steps:

Week 1: Take one dose before dinner.

Week 2: Take one dose before breakfast (or lunch) and one dose before dinner.

Week 3: Take one dose before breakfast (or lunch) and two doses before dinner.

The exact time does not matter, but at first these steps will help lower the chance of side effects. After three weeks, you may change the time you take each dose to fit your schedule.

Managing your medications

If you are taking other medications, take the time to talk with your doctor or health care professional about psyllium and your other medicines.

- Why am I taking these medications?
- How often and how long should I take them?
- Are there any special instructions or changes to how I should take any medications?
- Are there activities that I should avoid while taking any of my medications?
- What kind of side effects could I have? What symptoms should I look for?
- How can I avoid side effects?

How can I remember to take my medications?

We all have a hard time adjusting to new routines in our lives. These tips work for others; maybe they can help you too.

- Make a simple chart and post it in an obvious place where you will see it every day, like the bathroom mirror.

- Set your alarm clock, watch, or computer as a reminder.
- Take medications at the same time every day: before bed, at mealtime, or at the beginning of a daily activity, such as getting the mail or watching the evening news.
- Use a pillbox with seven sections, one for each day of the week.
- Record when you take your medication on a wallet card or calendar.
- Can you think of others?

Additional resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and more.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.