

Q. Can exercise help lower bad cholesterol levels?

A. High levels of “bad cholesterol,” or LDL cholesterol, can cause heart disease. The good news is that exercise helps prevent this disease and keeps your arteries healthy in several ways:

Prevents Weight Gain

Exercise helps burn extra calories. Every extra pound of fat you have produces more cholesterol. This raises your “bad cholesterol” level and your risk for heart disease.

Raises HDL Cholesterol

HDL cholesterol, or “good cholesterol,” helps remove bad cholesterol in your arteries. You can increase your HDL cholesterol by exercising at least 30-40 minutes a day. In a recent study, a group of people exercised three to four times per week for 20 to 40 minutes. Researchers found that regular exercise helped increase HDL levels. As a result, the group also lowered LDL levels and the risk for heart disease by about 10 percent.

Reduces Inflammation

Exercise helps reduce inflammation in your arteries. Left untreated, this inflammation can lead to a build-up of bad cholesterol and clog your arteries.



Cuts Risk for Heart Attack

Most studies show that people who exercise regularly cut their risk of a heart attack in half. If you are not physically active, you’re at greater risk for heart attack and other health risk factors.

Other Benefits

Exercise also helps lower your blood pressure and blood sugar levels. When these are high, they can damage your arteries. Exercise also strengthens your heart muscle, and improves circulation to your heart, brain, and the rest of your body.

Eat healthy foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, legumes, and other foods high in fiber. It’s one of the best ways to manage your cholesterol. You’re already on the right track if you are following a healthy diet. But sometimes diet alone won’t lower cholesterol levels enough.

Most people don’t realize that their arteries are blocked until they have a heart attack or stroke. Before that happens to you, make exercise a regular part of your day.

Choose exercise activities that you enjoy. Try to exercise for 30 to 60 minutes a day. When you exercise, you should be active enough to raise your heart rate, breathe deeply, but not be out of breath. These are all signs that your exercise is making metabolic improvement to your health.

*Sources: Archives of Internal Medicine. 2007; 167:999-1008.
“A Healthy Cholesterol Level.” Online Wellness Center.*

