

# Jeni's Health & Fitness Tips

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Hi Everyone!

Many people have high cholesterol and are told that they should take steps to lower their cholesterol level. But what exactly is cholesterol and why is it important? Cholesterol is not necessarily bad. It is one of many substances created and used in the body to keep us healthy. Some cholesterol is produced naturally (levels can be affected by family history), while some comes from the food we eat.

Cholesterol does not dissolve in the blood. It is transported to and from the cells by lipoproteins. Low-density lipoprotein (**LDL**) represents **bad** cholesterol while high-density lipoprotein (**HDL**) is known as **good** cholesterol. These two types of lipids, together with **triglycerides**, and **Lp(a)** cholesterol make up the total cholesterol count. Too much bad cholesterol and not enough good cholesterol increases the risk of heart disease and stroke.

**LDL (bad cholesterol)** builds up in the walls of the arteries that feed the heart and brain. It forms plaque that narrows and hardens the arteries. A clot blocking a narrowed artery can result in heart attack or stroke.

**HDL (good cholesterol)**, on the other hand protects against heart attack by carrying cholesterol away from the arteries and back to the liver where it is eliminated from the body. Some medical experts believe that HDL removes excess cholesterol from arterial plaque therefore slowing its buildup.

**Triglyceride** is a fat made in the body. High triglycerides are often coupled with high LDL cholesterol. Elevated triglyceride level can be due to physical inactivity, obesity, smoking, excess alcohol and a diet very high in carbohydrates.

**Lp(a)** cholesterol is a genetic variation of LDL cholesterol. High levels present a risk for fatty deposits narrowing arteries.

To lower bad cholesterol levels naturally there are dietary changes we can make and we can also increase the amount of cardio-vascular exercise we get. We need at least half an hour a day of aerobic exercise. As for diet some rules are:

**Avoid hydrogenated oils.** These are found in margarine products, baked goods such as cookies, crackers, pastries. Check labels on salad dressings and soups and peanut butter as they are sometimes added to these.

**Avoid processed foods.** Anything manufactured and pre-packaged. Virtually all these foods are unhealthy. Think about the original food source and how far removed from this the product is. The more it has changed from its original form, the less healthy it is likely to be and the more likely it will raise your bad cholesterol level.

**Make sure you include good fats in your diet** such as omega-3 oils, found in flaxseeds, extra virgin olive oil, nuts and seeds. **Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables and whole grains.**

High cholesterol is one major controllable risk factor for heart disease and stroke. So it is advisable to know your cholesterol level and take action if the **bad** cholesterol level is too high.

Yours in health,

*Jeni*

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