

Diabetes: How to Manage Your Cholesterol



When you have diabetes, you are at a higher risk of getting other health problems, such as heart disease, over time. And you are more likely to have a heart attack or stroke.

High cholesterol is also common with diabetes. High cholesterol causes your blood vessels to get clogged, which makes a heart attack or stroke even more likely. If you have high cholesterol, lowering it may help you live a healthier and longer life.

If you smoke and you also have high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol, it puts you at a very high risk for heart disease or stroke. Quitting smoking can help you lower your risk.

Cholesterol tests and goals

A big part of managing your cholesterol is knowing what your cholesterol levels are and what goals you are working toward.

Cholesterol tests

You will not feel any symptoms when your cholesterol is too high, so you will need to get your levels checked regularly.

Your doctor uses a simple blood test to check your cholesterol levels. The test shows your levels of different kinds of cholesterol.

LDL is the "bad" kind of cholesterol that you need to lower. **HDL** is the "good" kind that you may need to raise. You also may need to lower your **triglycerides**, which are a type of fat, and your **total cholesterol**.

Cholesterol goals

Talk to your doctor about your cholesterol goals. Because you have diabetes, your treatment will focus on lowering your LDL. But your doctor may want to watch all of your levels. Here are some general guidelines.

Cholesterol and triglyceride goals

Type of cholesterol	Goal
LDL (bad cholesterol)	Less than 100, or less than 70 if your doctor advises
HDL (good cholesterol)	Higher than 40 for men, or higher than 50 for women
Total	Less than 200
Triglycerides	Less than 150

Lifestyle changes to manage cholesterol

Making healthy lifestyle changes can help you control your cholesterol.

Ask your doctor about Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLC). TLC helps you focus on getting active, eating a cholesterol-lowering diet, and losing weight if needed.

Activity

Getting active can help you raise your HDL (good cholesterol) and lower your LDL (bad cholesterol). And it may help you lose weight.

- Before you start a new activity, talk to your doctor about how much exercise is safe.
- Start slowly, and go at a pace you can handle.
- Try to do at least 2½ hours of moderate exercise a week.
- Call your doctor right away if exercise causes chest pain or makes you easily short of breath. Sometimes you can be short of breath from being out of shape, but it also can be a warning sign of a heart attack.

Walking is an easy, low-cost way to be active. Walking with a partner helps you keep up a routine. Try using a pedometer to count your steps and set walking goals.

Here are some other ideas for getting active:

- Do yard work or gardening.
- Play actively with your children or grandchildren.
- Go for a bike ride.
- Take the stairs whenever you can.
- Swim or take a water aerobics class.
- Join a health club or walking group.

Healthy eating

Healthy eating is key to lowering your cholesterol. And it may help you lose weight. The TLC diet focuses on foods that are low in cholesterol, saturated fat, and trans fat. It includes:

- Lean meat, poultry, fish, and dried beans.
- Fruits and vegetables.
- Whole grains and cereals.

You can work with a dietitian to make a healthy eating plan.

Medicines to manage cholesterol

Statins are medicines that help lower your cholesterol. These medicines:

- Reduce how much cholesterol your body makes.
- Help you reach your cholesterol goal, along with lifestyle changes.
- Lower your risk for having a heart attack.

If your LDL goal is less than 100, your doctor will most likely have you take statins to help you reach this goal. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about side effects.

Your doctor also may give you medicines called fibrates to lower your triglycerides.

Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine. You may be able to take a different medicine or a lower dose.