

High Density Lipoproteins (HDL)

HDL is commonly known as the “good cholesterol” since it protects against heart disease. It is part of a lipid panel measured by a simple blood draw. The blood sample should be taken after a 12 hour fast (no food or drink – except water) otherwise it can be inaccurate.

HDL Cholesterol Levels:

Males -Less than 40 mg/dL – A major risk factor for heart disease

Females – Less than 50 mg/dl – A major risk factor for heart disease

40-59 mg/dL – The higher the HDL level the better!

>60 mg/dL – High HDL Cholesterol. An HDL of 60 mg/dL or higher is considered protective against heart disease.

Increasing your HDL levels:

- Exercise. **Routine exercise is the best way to boost your HDL levels.** Recent studies show that regular physical activity can significantly increase HDL cholesterol levels and thus reduce your risk. For health benefits to the heart, lungs and circulation, perform any moderate-to-vigorous-intensity aerobic activity for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week at 50-75 percent of your maximum heart rate. You can accumulate 30 minutes in 10 or 15 minute sessions. What's important is to include physical activity as part of a regular routine.
- Quit Smoking. Tobacco lowers HDL.
- Adopt a moderate fat diet with most of the fat coming from mono and polyunsaturated fats. Limit the saturated fat in your diet (fried foods and commercially baked snacks).
- Avoid Trans Fats. Trans fatty acids are currently present in many of your favorite prepared foods - anything in which the nutrition label reads "partially hydrogenated vegetable oils" - so eliminating them from the diet is not a trivial task. But trans fatty acids not only increase LDL cholesterol levels, they also reduce HDL cholesterol levels. Removing them from your diet will almost certainly result in a measurable increase in HDL levels.
- Use canola or olive oil when possible (benefits due to the monounsaturated fat content).
- Include fish in 1-2 meals per week (benefits due to high content of omega 3 fatty acids). Especially salmon, herring, sea bass, tuna, halibut, shellfish, and sardines. Walnuts, flaxseed, pistachios, and almonds are also good sources of omega 3 fatty acids.
- Use margarine as a substitute for butter, and choose soft margarines (liquid or tub varieties) over harder stick forms. Shop for margarine with no more than 2 grams of saturated fat per tablespoon and with liquid vegetable oil as the first ingredient. Look for those labeled "trans-fat free."
- French fries, doughnuts, cookies and crackers are examples of foods that are high in trans fat. Consume them infrequently.
- Drink red wine? Red Wine (due to its antioxidants) has been studied and has had a small effect on improving HDL levels. The same effect can be gained by drinking red grape juice.
- Dark Chocolate? Dark chocolate (due to its antioxidants) has been studied with some results that are promising. Moderation is key as chocolate can be high in calories. Reading labels is equally as important as it needs to be 75% cocoa to qualify for the benefit. Most dark chocolates don't qualify – if sugar is the first ingredient, it does not contain the amount of cocoa needed to give an antioxidant boost.

Heart disease is the number one killer of Americans. Exercise and a heart healthy diet are recommended to reduce the risk of heart disease. Incorporate fruits, vegetables, fat-free milk products and whole grains as the focus of your meals.