



♥ What is HDL Cholesterol?

High-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol is known as the “good” cholesterol because a high level of it is associated with a lower risk for heart attack. This type of cholesterol protects against plaque buildup in your arteries by carrying cholesterol away from the arteries and out of the body. An HDL cholesterol level less than 40 mg/dL is considered a risk factor for heart disease, and many experts believe that a level less than 50 mg/dL in women indicates an increased risk because on average, women naturally have higher levels than men.

What can I do to increase my HDL Cholesterol?

There are several ways to help improve your HDL cholesterol:

- ❑ **Lose weight if you are overweight.**
- ❑ **Stop smoking if you currently smoke, and avoid other people’s smoke if you can.**
- ❑ **Aim to be physically active (for example, brisk walking, jogging, or bicycling) for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week. (60 minutes if trying to lose weight)**
- ❑ **Increase your intake of “good” fats – monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. Examples of foods containing good fats are fish, olive oil, canola oil, almonds, and avocados. Consume these good fats in place of saturated fats.**
- ❑ **Read food labels and avoid foods that contain hydrogenated fats, trans fats (found mostly in processed foods), and cholesterol.**
- ❑ **Decrease consumption of refined sugars in the diet. When consumed in excess, these can promote a rise in triglyceride levels and lower HDL levels.**

♥ What about medications?

Improving your lifestyle is important to optimize cholesterol levels but in some individuals it is not enough. Talk to your healthcare provider to see if you are a candidate for drug therapy to increase your HDL cholesterol, especially if you have existing heart disease. There are several different types of medications that work to raise HDL cholesterol, lower LDL cholesterol, or both. Extensive clinical trials have shown that medicines that lower LDL lower risk for heart disease. The benefit of HDL-raising effect of some drugs is still under investigation. Never take non-prescription therapies unless recommended and monitored by your physician.