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Cholesterol Basics: A Proactive Guide to Lowering Your Levels

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that your body needs to build cell membranes and produce certain hormones. However, having consistently elevated cholesterol can lead to a buildup of fatty plaques in your arteries, increasing your risk for heart disease and stroke.

Fortunately, cholesterol levels are highly responsive to everyday self-care habits. This guide outlines straightforward, practical steps you can take to manage and lower your cholesterol.

Nutritional Foundations for Lowering Cholesterol

What you put on your plate is one of your most powerful defenses against elevated cholesterol. Focus on shifting your dietary patterns with these high-impact changes:

- **Increase Soluble Fiber Intake:** Soluble fiber acts like a sponge in your digestive tract, binding to cholesterol molecules and flushing them out of your body before they can enter your bloodstream. Incorporate more oats, barley, lentils, beans, brussels sprouts, and fruits like apples and pears.
 - **Incorporate Fiber Supplements:** If it is difficult to get enough fiber from meals alone, taking an over-the-counter soluble fiber supplement (such as psyllium husk capsules) can help. As detailed on the [Good Health Outcomes Resources Page](#), always take fiber supplements with a full glass of water, and space them apart from your other medications.
 - **Swap Your Fats:** Cut back on saturated fats found in fatty meats, butter, cheese, and highly processed baked goods. Replace them with heart-healthy unsaturated fats, such as olive oil, avocados, walnuts, almonds, and omega-3-rich fish, like salmon or mackerel.
 - **Eliminate Trans Fats:** Carefully check food labels and completely avoid anything containing "partially hydrogenated oils," which actively raise bad cholesterol while lowering your good cholesterol.
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Lifestyle Habits That Boost Metabolic Health

Pairing a heart-healthy diet with deliberate daily routines helps optimize your liver's ability to clear excess cholesterol from your system:

- **Commit to Regular Aerobic Exercise:** Physical activity is a proven way to stimulate the enzymes that move cholesterol from your blood vessels back to your liver for disposal. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity movement (such as brisk walking, cycling, or swimming) every week.
 - **Incorporate Strength Training:** Adding resistance or weight training at least twice a week preserves lean muscle mass and enhances your overall metabolic efficiency, which supports long-term lipid management.
 - **Eliminate Tobacco and Limit Alcohol:** Smoking accelerates the formation of dangerous arterial plaque and damages blood vessels. Quitting smoking significantly improves your cardiovascular profile. Additionally, cutting back on excess alcohol helps reduce overall triglycerides (fat in the blood).
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Highlights of Commonly Prescribed Cholesterol Medications

When lifestyle modifications are not quite enough to bring your numbers down to a safe range, healthcare providers routinely prescribe highly effective medications to protect your arteries:

Medication Class	Common Examples	How It Supports You
Statins	Atorvastatin (Lipitor), Simvastatin (Zocor), Rosuvastatin (Crestor)	The most widely prescribed first-line therapy. They work directly in the liver to block the enzyme responsible for creating cholesterol, significantly lowering blood levels.
Cholesterol Absorption Inhibitors	Ezetimibe (Zetia)	Often added to a statin or used if statins aren't tolerated. This daily pill physically prevents your small intestine from absorbing cholesterol from the food you eat.
PCSK9 Inhibitors	Alirocumab (Praluent), Evolocumab (Repatha)	Advanced, self-administered injectable medications given once or twice a month. They help the liver clear vastly more cholesterol out of the bloodstream.
Bile Acid Sequestrants	Colesevelam (Welchol)	A medication that binds to cholesterol-rich bile acids in your intestines, forcing your body to eliminate them rather than reabsorbing them.

Essential Tracking and Self-Care Safety

- **Track Your Progress with Lab Reviews:** Because high cholesterol has no physical symptoms, the only way to know if your self-care and medical efforts are working is through a fasting blood test called a lipid panel.
- **Maintain Medication Consistency:** If your provider prescribes a cholesterol-lowering medication, take it exactly as directed—often at bedtime, when your liver produces the most cholesterol. Never stop your medication abruptly without consulting your care team.

Take Charge of Your Cardiovascular Health: Ready to evaluate your overall lipid numbers or map out a customized strategy to keep your heart healthy? Schedule a virtual lab review or a personalized consultation directly on the [Good Health Outcomes Homepage](#) to build a sustainable, long-term health plan.

The above information was reviewed and validated by David Campbell-O'Dell, DNP, APRN-IP, FNP-BC, FAANP