



Lowering cholesterol to reduce your heart disease risk

Heart disease is the most common cause of hospitalization and death in the U.S. Lowering cholesterol reduces the chances of having a heart attack or stroke and of dying from heart disease.

Work with your health care provider to reduce your risk. Even if your cholesterol level is normal, these steps can reduce your risk of heart disease.



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Why is cholesterol important?

High cholesterol levels in the blood can lead to a buildup of fat in the blood vessels, particularly the arteries in your heart. This is called **atherosclerosis** (or “hardening of the arteries”).

Understanding cholesterol and your risk of heart disease

Cholesterol comes from two sources: your body and your diet. The liver makes cholesterol to circulate through the body. Cholesterol in your diet comes from animal sources, such as meat and full-fat dairy products.

A simple blood test will provide information about your cholesterol level. Factors that put you at risk for heart disease include:

- high LDL cholesterol
- high blood pressure
- diabetes
- smoking

Speak to your health care provider about what you can do to lower your risk of heart disease.

Choose a healthy diet

Foods that are low in fat or high in fiber can reduce the risk of heart disease.

EAT MORE



- fruits & vegetables
- whole grains
- fish and poultry
- nuts

EAT LESS



- red meat
- refined grains
- sugary beverages

Lower the salt in your diet

Diets like the DASH diet and Mediterranean diet emphasize healthy food options and can reduce cholesterol without medication. Visit our website, **[AlosaHealth.org/modules/Lipids](https://www.AlosaHealth.org/modules/Lipids)**, for more information about these diets.



A healthy diet can reduce the risk of heart disease.



Get moving

Exercising three to four times a week can reduce the risk of heart disease. Forty minutes each time is best, but any activity is better than none. Find an activity that is enjoyable to you, such as:

- brisk walking
- swimming
- bicycling

Quit smoking

Tobacco use sharply increases your risk of heart attack, stroke, and death. For help quitting, call **1-800-QUITNOW**.

Why do I need to take medications?

You may benefit most from cholesterol-lowering treatment if you have:

- a history of a heart attack, stroke, or a diagnosis of heart disease,
- very high cholesterol levels,
- diabetes, or
- a high risk of future cardiovascular disease

Medication options

Based on your risk of heart disease, your doctor may recommend medicines called statins. **Statins** reduce your body's production of cholesterol and are very effective in preventing cardiovascular events like heart attack and stroke. Common statins are atorvastatin (Lipitor), simvastatin (Zocor), rosuvastatin (Crestor), and pravastatin (Pravachol).

Statins can cause muscle aches in some patients. This may go away with time, but not always. Not all muscle aches are related to statin therapy. In many cases, it may be safe to try a different statin. Your health care provider may order a blood test to make sure the muscle aches are not a symptom of other serious conditions.

Want to know more?

Visit our website at **AlosaHealth.org/modules/Lipids** for resources from:

- American Heart Association
 - Centers for Disease Control (CDC)
 - CDC Nutrition Information
 - US Department of Agriculture
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These are general recommendations only; specific clinical decisions should be made by the treating physician based on an individual patient's clinical condition.

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