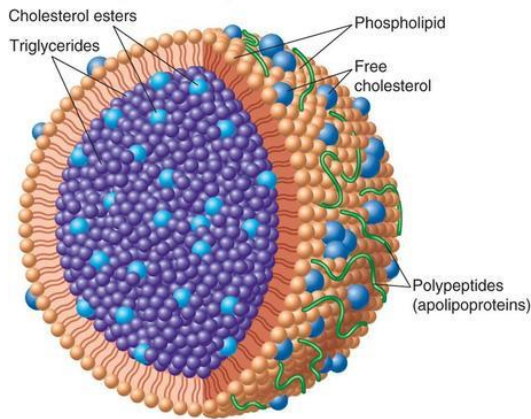


# Reducing Cholesterol Naturally

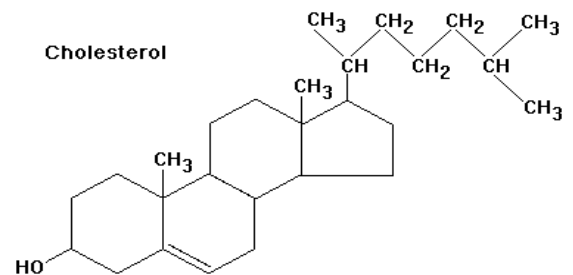


Cholesterol has been given a bad name, and the general public has been led to believe that high cholesterol itself is the cause of heart disease. In the last few years however, there has been a small backlash against this way of thinking - the “cholesterol sceptics”, who say that high cholesterol is nothing to worry about. In fact, both arguments appear to have their flaws.

Cholesterol is a natural substance made by the body. It is essential to our survival and needed for basic cellular health, our nervous system, digestive system (cholesterol is needed to form bile) and is also a precursor to steroid hormones and

vitamin D. So why would our cholesterol levels increase? Although eating high levels of saturated fat is thought to cause a small increase in cholesterol, the advice for everyone to lower saturated fat intake as far as possible has been misleading. Most cholesterol is actually made by the body and has little to do with cholesterol or fat content in food. Furthermore, a small amount of saturated fats from healthy sources, such as coconut oil, is not something to worry about. It's thought that our bodies start making more cholesterol as a protective response to damage or illness. This is why high cholesterol is often seen in conjunction with disease, and can therefore be a good indicator that something is out of balance, but does not mean cholesterol itself causes the disease. This would also imply that lowering cholesterol is not the “cure” for a disease as well, if the underlying cause is not addressed.

Cholesterol is carried around our body in little packages called lipoproteins, which contain other substances as well, not just cholesterol. Information can be confusing, because lipoproteins and cholesterol are often talked about as the same thing, when in fact they are not – and people can be told they have high cholesterol, when in fact it's the lipoprotein numbers that are up. The newest thinking proposes that the connection between cholesterol and heart disease is actually due to damage which occurs to the packages (lipoproteins) carrying the cholesterol around the body. The lipoproteins are delicate and are prone to damage from toxins, infections, high blood sugar levels and also high blood pressure amongst other things. Once the lipoproteins are damaged they cause inflammatory reactions, which create havoc in our blood vessels. The theory is that these underlying processes contribute to the development of cardiovascular disease. There are different lipoproteins doing different jobs, and some are more prone to damage than others, which is why people may be told they have a lot of “bad” cholesterol, and not enough of the “good” type.



So it's a complex situation. It's not just about how much cholesterol or lipoproteins are in the blood, but what type of lipoproteins, how long they are in the blood for, and what factors are present that could cause damage to the delicate lipoproteins.

**A word about statins:** There is no doubt these cholesterol-lowering drugs do significantly lower cholesterol, which for a small group of patients has been shown to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease. There isn't so much evidence for their widespread use though and they have side effects. Taking statins results in lower levels of CoQ10, which is incredibly important for energy production and

healthy nerve function amongst other things. For this reason, anyone on statins should talk to their doctor about CoQ10 supplements.

There are other ways to reduce cholesterol naturally. Certain supplements, particularly vitamin B3 and red yeast rice that have been shown to be beneficial, but this needs to be done under the guidance of your nutritional therapist or doctor and must not be taken in combination with statins. However, the following suggestions are safe for everyone to use. They are aimed at both reducing the amount of cholesterol, and also preventing damage to the lipoproteins.

### ***Eat a diet rich in fibre & antioxidants***

Eating plenty of fruit and vegetables is the best way to increase fibre and antioxidants. Build up to around 7-8 servings a day. Also include nuts and seeds, whole grains and legumes such as chickpeas, pinto beans, navy and kidney beans.



### ***Reduce use of vegetable oil***

Industrial vegetable and seed oils and their products, such as sunflower oil and margarine, are easily damaged and more prone to trigger inflammatory reactions. Avoid these and go for coconut oil when cooking as it's very stable and not prone to damage like other oils. Extra virgin olive oil is great for salads or warm meals, but don't fry with it as this damages the delicate structure.

### ***Include plant sterols in your diet***

Foods that are high in plant sterols are known to naturally lower cholesterol. You can find these in foods such as oats, brown rice, legumes, nuts and seeds and many fruit and veg such as avocados, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussel sprouts, apples and blueberries. Even though many margarines do contain plant sterols, these have been highly processed and are prone to damage so definitely avoid these!

### ***Protect your liver***

A healthy liver is essential for regulating cholesterol levels, because the liver acts as a "packaging factory" for lipoproteins. Make sure you don't overdo the alcohol, but also there are some foods that are particularly helpful for the liver. These include artichokes, chicory, chard, endives, cress, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, bok choy, cabbage, asparagus, rocket, lemon and grapefruit.

### ***Exercise***

Exercise is really important for reducing cholesterol. Although intense exercise has been shown to be particularly beneficial, just walking 10 000 steps a day is a good place to start. Get yourself a pedometer and start counting!

### ***Reduce toxic overload***

Smoking is a big factor, as it not only contributes to higher toxic levels, but also increases blood pressure, another factor implicated in damage to lipoproteins and blood vessel walls. High levels of glucose in the blood, from a diet high in refined sugar, can also cause damage to the lipoproteins. So reduce the amount of sugar in the diet. Not only in the obvious places, like sweets, cakes, biscuits and fizzy drinks, but also the hidden sugar crammed into processed foods, including savoury foods like ready meals and crisps.

*Sources and further information:* [www.cholesterol-and-health.com](http://www.cholesterol-and-health.com), [www.chriskresser.com/the-diet-heart-myth-cholesterol-and-saturated-fat](http://www.chriskresser.com/the-diet-heart-myth-cholesterol-and-saturated-fat)