

# Does Exercise Lower Cholesterol?

## The right lifestyle changes can make all the difference

When it comes to cholesterol, we often hear of the “good” and the “bad.” The “good” (HDL) cholesterol in our bodies helps to remove the “bad” (LDL) cholesterol from our bloodstream to help our organs function properly.

High levels of LDL cholesterol can damage your arteries, put you at greater risk for heart disease, heart attack, increase your risk of stroke and arterial blockages — so if your doctor tells you to lower your bad cholesterol, it’s time to make a move.

“Exercise is a great place to start if you’re trying to lower bad cholesterol,” says cardiologist Leslie Cho, MD. “But it doesn’t stop there. Combining exercise with healthier diet and lifestyle choices makes the most impact.”

Find out what the best exercises for lowering cholesterol are and how to get started.

## How does exercise improve cholesterol levels?

Exercise works to eliminate the dangerous, fatty LDL cholesterol by increasing HDL cholesterol. Losing weight also increases HDL.

According to the American Heart Association, high cholesterol is caused by two lifestyle elements that happen to go hand-in-hand: lack of exercise and being overweight (among other factors).

So, by natural deduction, it's easy to see why exercise would be the no-brainer solution to improving cholesterol levels.

## **How much exercise is needed to lower cholesterol?**

Aerobic exercise that's repetitive and works multiple muscle groups, is the best exercise to reduce cholesterol. The American Heart Association recommends exercising for at least 30 minutes five to seven times per week. "You can start slow and ramp up," says Dr. Cho.

## **The best exercises to lower cholesterol**

### **Brisk walks or jogging**

There's no need to hit the treadmill or elliptical at full speed. In fact, if you're not used to running, are overweight or have issues with your joints, it could do more harm to your body than good.

Start with an easy walk around the block, then a longer walk, then a slow jog. Not only will you be lowering your cholesterol, but you'll be lowering your blood pressure, too.

### **Cycling**

You didn't have to think about cholesterol levels as a kid, and maybe that's because you were staying active by riding your bike around town with friends and family. Get back in touch with your inner child and hop back on a bike to lower cholesterol.

Cycling/biking can burn just as many calories as jogging, but it's easier on your knees. All you have to do is find an appropriately-sized and comfortable bike and ride off into the healthy cholesterol level sunset.

## Swimming

If walking, running and biking are proving to be too much on your body, swimming can solve your cholesterol problems just as effectively.

When you take a few laps in the pool, you're working your entire body, and you're doing so in a way that can feel therapeutic. Swimming is great for overall heart health and part of that is lowering your cholesterol.

## Yoga

The best news for someone who isn't so keen on cardio is that yoga, too, is good. However, to get cardiovascular benefits, you need to increase your heart rate.

Yoga is also great for:

- Improved flexibility.
- Working your physical and mental muscles as well as improving sleep, leading to improvements in other lifestyle habits.

“The slowness of yoga can be much less intimidating compared to other exercises, especially if you didn't regularly workout before,” says Dr. Cho.

## How to get started on an exercise plan to lower cholesterol

“Always check with your doctor before starting an exercise program, especially if your high cholesterol is putting you at more immediate risk for heart disease or stroke,” says Dr. Cho.

If you experience chest pain, shortness of breath, dizziness or lightheadedness during exercise, stop immediately. Dr. Cho adds more general tips for getting started:

- **Start slow.** If you are new to an exercise program, start with a short amount of time, and slowly increase. Low and slow, all the way. Start with a 15-minute exercise, then build up to at least 30 minutes of exercise each day. “The optimal goal is to achieve approximately 200 minutes per week of exercise,” Dr. Cho says.
- **Stay hydrated.** Drink water when you are thirsty, and remember that in hot or humid conditions you may need to drink even more water to maintain hydration.
- **Stay comfortable.** Wear sneakers or flat shoes with laces that have good support.
- **Stay on top of it.** Make exercise a regular part of your healthy lifestyle, and try to exercise at the same time each day so it becomes a habit.
- **Stay motivated.** Ask family and friends to join you to help keep you motivated and healthy. This also can help them to start or continue their own journey to a healthy lifestyle.

“The great thing about exercise is that it doesn’t always have to be the same,” says Dr. Cho. Change it up, keep it exciting and know that in good time, your hard work will pay off in the form of lower cholesterol.



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