

THE TOP HEALTH[®]

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September is Cholesterol Education Month.

How's Your HDL?



Keeping your LDL (bad) cholesterol low is primary to heart health. One part of controlling LDL is boosting your HDL (good) cholesterol.

Basic good health is key to better HDL. Adopting positive lifestyle habits can also help lower LDL cholesterol and lead to other healthful effects. The top recommendations:

- 1. Get active.** Moderate- to vigorous-intensity exercise is best for boosting HDL. Aim for 150 minutes per week of exercise, preferably activity that raises your heart rate. **Note:** Get your health care provider's approval before significantly changing your exercise routine.
- 2. Lose excess weight.** Losing 5% to 10% of your current weight can raise HDL, along with reducing blood pressure and blood sugar.
- 3. Avoid trans fats.** Some manufacturers have eliminated trans fats, but they remain in some processed foods – so check Nutrition Facts panels. Removing trans fats from your diet can improve HDL and LDL levels. Choose better fats found in nuts, olive oil and avocados instead.
- 4. Reduce refined carbohydrates.** Switch to whole grains, such as oats, quinoa and brown rice, instead of white flour and white rice.
- 5. Limit sugary and highly processed foods;** replace with fruits, vegetables and protein low in saturated fat.
- 6. Stop smoking.** Smoking lowers your HDL and raises your LDL.



Screening: Have your health care provider check your cholesterol and recommend the best approach to improving your numbers.

“The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible.” – Arthur C. Clarke

Decoding the Studies Behind the News



Did you catch today's medical news? It's hard to miss the headlines – reporting of medical studies, scientific claims and health warnings has increased significantly in recent years.

It's a lot of information to process – especially when the findings don't always answer your questions, or multiple studies about the same thing contradict each other.

For the real story behind the headlines, consider:

- 1. Size and duration of the study:** Studies that last for several years or are ongoing, involving thousands of people, are more reliable than small, short-term studies. Examples of famous, long-term studies: the Framingham Heart Study, Physicians' Health Study and Nurses' Health Study.
- 2. Source of the study:** Research papers published in clinical journals (such as *Journal of the American Medical Association* and *New England Journal of Medicine*) are the most reliable because the research has been peer reviewed by experts in the same field as the papers' authors.
- 3. Type of study:** In general, randomized trials, cohort (long-term, ongoing) studies and human subjects in a scientific setting provide the most relevant data for how the results might affect you.
- 4. Previous research:** The more science that's available with similar findings, the more reliable the study. If the study's results are new, consider it a preliminary step with more research needed.

Who funded the study? Sponsors who have a financial interest in study results may influence how studies are performed.

Some reliable sources: To learn more about a medical study, start with medical journals and federal websites, including the CDC, National Institutes of Health and National Library of Medicine.

Practice skepticism. Each new finding is usually just a small part of growing knowledge. Knowing this may save you some worry and confusion.

5 Steps to Less Foot Pain

A major obstacle to staying physically active is foot soreness.

To beat the sore feet cycle:



- 1. Treat your feet to good shoes.** Make sure they allow you to function normally, whatever your activity. The wrong footwear can lead to heel pain, bunions, corns and other painful, chronic problems. Feet change shape as we age, so always get sized before you buy. Style is nice, but shoes should conform to the shape of your feet, with a roomy toe box and snug, low heel.
- 2. Use shoe inserts.** Over-the-counter or custom orthotics, including arch supports, insoles and heel liners, come in various materials and designs. They can provide comfort and aid movement despite stubborn foot problems.
- 3. Research before choosing sport shoes.** A podiatrist can help, especially if you have chronic foot problems or hard-to-fit feet.
- 4. Retire those pointy, sky-high heels.** They can cause serious, sometimes permanent foot, leg and back problems. The same goes for non-supportive flip-flop sandals. Limit wearing extreme, non-supportive footwear to short periods.
- 5. Lose excess weight.** Your feet bear the weight of your entire body, so the more pounds they support, the more stressed they become.

If foot pain is keeping you inactive, try a low-impact sport such as swimming or cycling. And get help from your health care provider.



Q: What is serotonin?

A: Serotonin is a type of brain chemical, or **neurotransmitter**, made by cells in the brain, digestive tract and blood. Serotonin helps control mood, appetite, sleep, memory, temperature regulation and social behavior. These functions are affected when serotonin levels aren't normal.

Low production of serotonin can lead to depression. Certain antidepressant medications are designed to boost serotonin levels to lift mood. **Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)** are commonly used to treat depression as well as panic attacks and other anxiety disorders.

Excess serotonin also can cause problems. When 2 or more drugs that raise serotonin levels are taken together, a condition called **serotonin syndrome** may result. Symptoms include fever, sweating, rapid heartbeat, high blood pressure, confusion and muscle rigidity. Serotonin syndrome is a medical emergency; it can be fatal without immediate treatment.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAFP

Sidestep Sodium

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Did you know? Only 5% of the sodium you consume comes from table salt. And while it's true salt adds flavor to food, and we do need some sodium for normal body functioning, we easily consume more than we need.

That's a concern, because too much sodium can increase your risk of high blood pressure. To cut back on sodium, eat fewer processed foods – the source of more than 75% of the average person's sodium intake. Processed foods include fast food and restaurant meals, deli meat and packaged foods (bags, bottles, boxes and cans).

Reduce sodium in 2 steps: (1) Minimize packaged foods and (2) replace them with fresh, unprocessed foods including vegetables, fruit, whole grains, lean meat and poultry, fish, nuts and beans. When you must buy processed items, look for foods that list the percent daily value for sodium as 5% or less.

Besides enhancing flavor, why do food processors add sodium? Sodium-based ingredients may be used for many other reasons. For example:

- » Sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) is used to help make cakes rise.
- » Sodium benzoate is used in condiments to maintain freshness.
- » Sodium nitrite is used in deli meats to prevent bacterial growth.
- » Sodium phosphate is used to emulsify oil into processed cheese.

And, some sweet foods, such as candy bars and breakfast cereals, may contain sodium as a preservative.



Smart Moves toolkit is at www.personalbest.com/extras/16V9tools.

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