

Lowering Your High Cholesterol: 6 Exercises That Will Pay Off



Source: <https://www.healthline.com/health/high-cholesterol/treating-with-statins/best-exercises>

When you were first diagnosed with high cholesterol, your doctor may have talked to you about exercise. Besides improving your diet, exercising is one of the most effective lifestyle changes you can make to help bring your numbers down naturally.

Your first thought may have been, “I hate running.” Or maybe you like running, but you’ve been sidelined lately because of an injury. Or maybe you don’t mind jogging, but you hate the treadmill.

Running isn’t the only way to turn your health around. There’s no doubt that it’s an effective aerobic exercise, but several other good choices are available that can help counteract the negative affects high cholesterol has on your health.

Why exercise is effective at lowering cholesterol

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Cholesterol is one of the fatty substances we have circulating in our blood. If we have too much, it can stick to the inside walls of our arteries, narrowing them and increasing risk of cardiovascular disease.

It's not only the amount of cholesterol in the blood that affects our risk, though. Other factors play a part. One of these is the type of protein that carries the cholesterol through the body. Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol is more likely to cause problems. High-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol protects the body from cholesterol buildup.

Exercise helps increase levels of HDL good cholesterol. Researchers reported on this in [Lipids in Health and Disease Trusted Source](#). Physically active women had significantly higher levels of HDL cholesterol than sedentary women. Another study published in [Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis, and Vascular Biology Trusted Source](#) found similar results. In men with belly fat, regular endurance exercise increased HDL good cholesterol levels.

Exercise may even change the nature of our cholesterol. In 2002, researchers from [Duke University Medical Center](#) found that exercise improved the number and size of the particles carrying cholesterol through the body. Those who exercised more had larger, "fluffier" particles that were less likely to clog arteries.

Exercise can help you lower cholesterol numbers even if you're overweight. In the [Journal of Obesity](#), researchers reported that overweight and obese adults who walked, jogged, and cycled while eating a cholesterol-lowering diet improved total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, and triglyceride levels.

Best exercises for lowering cholesterol

Some research has indicated that it may be that "how much" you exercise is more important than what kind of exercise you do. That means it's worth it to incorporate more activity into your day however you can. Take a walk during your lunch hour, choose the stairs, stand up to take phone calls, or store a jump rope at your desk.

In addition, try to incorporate at least 30 minutes of structured exercise into each day. Any exercise is better than none, but the following six types have shown in studies to be effective at reducing cholesterol levels.

1. Go for a nice run or jog

If your joints are in good shape and you enjoy jogging, you're in luck, as this is a great exercise for lowering cholesterol and for managing your weight. Don't think you have to race, though. An easy jog for a few miles may be better for lowering cholesterol than a fast sprint around the block.

In a 2013 study published in the [Archives of Internal Medicine](#), researchers reported that long-distance runners showed significantly better improvements in HDL cholesterol levels than short-distance runners (less than 10 miles a week). They also saw better improvements in their blood pressure.

2. Take a brisk walk

Whether walking is as good as running for cardiovascular health has long been the subject of debate. Especially as we get older, walking can often be a much better exercise in terms of protecting joint health.

Researchers reported good news on this in 2013 in the journal [Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis, and Vascular Biology](#)[Trusted Source](#). They compared tens of thousands of runners to an equal number of walkers. Results showed that the *amount* of exercise was what mattered, not the type.

People who exerted the same level of energy when exercising experienced similar benefits, whether they walked or ran. Benefits included reduced risk of high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

It takes longer to walk off calories than to run them off. If you burn 300 calories either way, though, you've spent about the same amount of energy. You are likely to experience similar benefits. Lead author of the study above, Paul Williams, stated that walking 4.3 miles at a brisk pace would take about the same amount of energy as running three miles.

3. Bike to work or just for fun

Cycling expends about the same energy as jogging, but it's easier on your joints. That's an important thing for many people as they age. Hips and knees are vulnerable to arthritis, and we all do need to watch out for them. If you're starting to feel some pain in these joints, it may be best to choose cycling over running.

If it's possible to bike to work, try it. Studies have shown some positive benefits. Scientists reported in the [Journal of the American Heart Association](#)[Trusted Source](#) that people who biked to work were less likely to develop high cholesterol than those who didn't.

A second study published in [Circulation](#)[Trusted Source](#) found that cycling reduces risk of heart disease. A group of adults between the ages of 50–65 who regularly spent time biking had 11–18 fewer heart attacks over the period of 20 years than those who didn't.

4. Take a few laps at the pool

Swimming is probably the most joint-saving aerobic exercise you can do. In a [2010 study](#), researchers compared swimming with walking in women aged 50 to 70 years. They found that swimming improved body weight, body fat distribution, and LDL cholesterol levels better than walking did.

Researchers also looked at the beneficial effects of swimming in men in the [International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education](#). They found that swimmers had 53 percent, 50 percent, and 49 percent lower risk of dying from any cause than did men who were sedentary, walkers, or runners, respectively.

5. Lift a few weights

So far, we've been talking mostly about aerobic exercise. It is the type of exercise most commonly recommended for reducing risk of heart disease.

Some research suggests, though, that resistance training is also extremely beneficial for those with high cholesterol. The journal [Atherosclerosis](#) published a study showing that those who participated in resistance training were able to clear LDL from their bloodstream faster than those who didn't.

Resistance training can also help you protect cardiovascular health. In [BMC Public Health](#)[Trusted Source](#), scientists reported that combining resistance and aerobic exercise helped people lose more weight and fat than either of these alone. The combination also created increased cardiovascular fitness.

Don't think you're too old to try weight lifting. It helps people of any age. [The Journals of Gerontology](#) published a study on women aged 70–87 years. Those who participated in a resistance-training program for about 11 weeks had significantly lower LDL cholesterol and total cholesterol levels compared with those who didn't.

6. Strike a few yoga poses

After all this talk about aerobic exercise and lifting weights, it may seem odd that yoga would show up on the list. After all, yoga is mostly stretching, right?

Studies show, however, that yoga may reduce risk of heart disease. In some cases, it may directly affect cholesterol levels.

Researchers reported in the [Indian Heart Journal](#) [Trusted Source](#) that a three-month yoga program helped reduce total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol. It also improved HDL cholesterol levels in diabetics. The participants practiced for about one hour a day.

In a large study review published in the [European Journal of Preventive Cardiology](#), those who regularly practiced yoga showed significant improvement in LDL cholesterol, HDL cholesterol, and blood pressure over those who didn't exercise.

Most any exercise will do — If you do it often

All of these exercises are helpful for reducing cholesterol and protecting you from cardiovascular disease. You can choose which is best for you based on your overall health, joint health, and lifestyle.

There are other options, as well. If you play tennis or dance regularly, you're likely to be expending about the same energy as someone who walks briskly or runs. The important thing is to get in at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise daily, with resistance training two times a week. Then add in more throughout your day when you can. Wherever you are, get up and move!