



# Managing High Cholesterol & High Triglycerides

There are two main kinds of blood fats that contribute to heart disease: cholesterol and triglycerides. Cholesterol has two important forms – LDL and HDL. **LDL** is sometimes called “bad” cholesterol because it is associated with “hardening of the arteries”. **HDL** is sometimes known as the “good” cholesterol because it clears cholesterol from the bloodstream to the liver, where it is removed from the body. **Triglycerides** are fats traveling through the bloodstream to be stored in tissues or the liver. The body makes triglycerides from fats and carbohydrates in the food you eat. The levels of fats in your blood may rise when you take certain medications but are also influenced by diet and genetics. Having high levels of either cholesterol or triglycerides not only increases your risk of heart disease and stroke but can also make you feel more tired and give you an inflamed pancreas (called pancreatitis).

The first step to lower your risk of heart disease is good ol’ **TLC**, which stands for **Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes**. If you make these changes, you’ll not only be healthier, but you may be able to avoid taking more medications:

- ✓ Achieving a **healthy weight** helps you feel good and helps lower cholesterol and triglycerides. Ask a Dietitian to help you determine your healthy weight and make a reasonable plan to reach it.
- ✓ **Stop smoking!** Smoking is the number 1 thing you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease. If you need help quitting, free programs are available through Seattle King County Public Health. Ask your Case Manager for more information.
- ✓ Increase your **physical activity**. Physical activity interacts with several risk factors to lower your risk and raise your HDL (the good cholesterol). Moderate exercise for 45-60 minutes every day is probably enough.
- ✓ See a Dietitian specializing in chronic illnesses to analyze your current **eating habits** and recommend specific changes to help you lower your risk. In general, eating a diet lower in saturated and trans fats, higher in mono- and poly-unsaturated fats, low in cholesterol (less than 200 mg/day), and high in fiber has been shown to be beneficial.
  - ++Try to eat **fewer** of the biggest culprits:
    - Cheese and other full fat dairy products like whole milk, ice cream, sour cream, cream cheese, and whipping cream
    - Animal fats, especially those found in hamburger, hot dogs, bologna, salami, sausage, fried foods, and fatty cuts of meat
    - High sugar and high fat commercial products like candy, pastries, pies, doughnuts, and cookies.
    - Alcohol consumption, even in small amounts, can raise triglycerides quite a bit
  - ++ And eat **more** of the most beneficial foods:
    - Fiber, both insoluble fiber (think roughage) and soluble fiber (oats, barley, etc), help absorb fats from your diet while in your gut so they don’t make it into your blood. Aim for at least 25 grams of fiber per day, with at least half in the form of soluble fiber. Choose brightly colored fruits and vegetables when possible.
    - Nuts, seeds, and fatty fish such as salmon and sardines all contain healthy mono- and poly- unsaturated oils that help keep your blood vessels healthy and flexible which help not only your heart but also your brain. Don’t overdo it on the nuts though – a handful per day is all you need. Cooking with canola oil and using olive oil in salad dressings and low heat cooking are other sources of healthy oils.

**SEE NEXT PAGE FOR SUPPLEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

If personalized **TLC** doesn't get you where you need to be, the next step is to try supplements. As with any supplement, be safe and make sure you tell your medical provider what you are taking.

- √ **Fish Oils:** To lower triglycerides consider omega 3 fatty acids in the form of fish oil supplements or the prescription Omacor®. Look for a high quality, high concentration formula that will equal at least 2 grams of EPA/DHA per day. The quality of products varies greatly so it is best to get advice on brand names from a Dietitian knowledgeable in supplementation. If you have low blood platelets, do not take fish oils because it may increase your risk of bleeding too easily. Flax seed and flax oil do not have the same effect as fish oils on lowering triglycerides. If you are vegetarian, there is one product available that has DHA made from bacteria, Neuromins®, however the amount per pill is so low that it would require too many pills per day to reach the amount needed to lower triglycerides.
- √ **Niacin:** Niacin can lower LDL cholesterol but it works best at raising HDL and lowering triglycerides. There are several different forms of niacin, available both in supplements and by prescription, so it is best to seek advice from your medical provider or a Dietitian to make sure you get the safest and most effective product and take a correct dosage. Avoid long acting niacin products (Slo-niacin®) because they can cause liver toxicity and avoid niacinamide products because they do not lower cholesterol. Niacin is not recommended for people with gout because it raises uric acid levels in the blood.
- √ **Plant Sterols/Stanols:** These work by blocking the absorption of fats in your gut. It's best to get these in foods but you can also take supplements. Take 2 grams per day with food. They can be found in Take Control® and Benecol® spreads as well as more and more products every day.
- √ **Policosanol:** Made from sugar cane, this supplement is available in a wide variety of cholesterol lowering products. Try 5-10 grams per day up to twice a day. If you have low blood platelets, do not take policosanol because it may increase your risk of bleeding too easily. Policosanol may also raise HDL levels.
- √ **L-Carnitine:** If you have really high triglycerides, more than around 500, try taking 2-3 grams a day for a month or two which may boost the function of your cell's fat burning centers (mitochondria). There is a prescription form Carnitor® and L-Carnitine is also available at quality supplement stores and natural health clinics like the Basytr Center for Natural Health.

If you've tried both personalized **TLC** and supplementation and you still have high cholesterol or triglycerides, you may need to take a prescription medication. Your medical provider can determine which is the safest for you to take although all come with a host of possible side effects and drug-nutrient interactions.

If you have been prescribed a cholesterol or triglyceride lowering medication, it would be wise to see a Dietitian who can help make sure you are getting enough of the vitamins and minerals that are needed to get the most benefit from the medications and reduce the risk of side effects.

*To schedule a FREE visit with a Chicken Soup Brigade dietitian, call (206) 957-1600*