



# How can I treat high cholesterol?

Lower your risk for heart disease—without drugs.

✦ **A physician says:** High levels of the fatty substance called low-density lipoprotein (LDL), or “bad” cholesterol, in the blood eventually harden into plaque on artery walls. When that plaque builds up, arteries narrow, which cuts off the amount of oxygen-carrying blood that can reach your heart; this can cause heart disease or a stroke. High-density lipoprotein (HDL), or “good” cholesterol, helps the body get rid of bad cholesterol by picking up the excess LDL and shuttling it to the liver, where it is broken down.

**Treatment:** Red yeast rice contains plant sterols that block cholesterol absorption. In recent studies, patients lowered their total cholesterol about 25 percent after taking 2.4 grams of the supplement daily. Four to 6 grams a day of omega-3s, found in fatty fish and flaxseed, also elevate HDL and reduce artery-hardening triglycerides.

—Michael C. Martin, M.D., internal medicine physician at the Center for Executive Medicine in Dallas

✦ **A traditional Chinese medicine practitioner says:** When the liver or spleen channels become blocked by excess fluids, it hinders the flow of *qi*, or energy, to the blood vessels. Good *qi* flow helps expel cholesterol so it isn't absorbed into the bloodstream; improving digestion and blood circulation both help to do this.

**Treatment:** The Chinese herb *shan zha* (hawthorn berries) can aid digestion and enhance circulation (but if you're taking medication for heart disease, consult your doctor first). Pour boiling water over about 6 grams (about a half tablespoon) of the herb and let it steep for 15 minutes for a sweet-tasting tea. Drink twice daily, and eat the dried berries left over in the cup for maximum effect. You can also improve circulation by getting the blood and *qi* moving with energy exercises such as tai chi and qigong.

—Karina Limpo, L.Ac., traditional Chinese medicine practitioner, herbalist and New York state licensed acupuncturist

✦ **A nutritionist says:** Only 5 percent of the population has genetically predetermined high cholesterol; the rest of us can control our cholesterol with diet and exercise. Changing what you eat is therefore a much more effective and lasting solution than prescription drugs.

**Treatment:** Eliminate all sugars from your diet. Sugar is an inflammatory food, and the body creates cholesterol to patch up arterial damage caused by inflammation. Basically, high cholesterol is the response to the inflammation that results from a diet high in sugar and starch. Instead, eat a diet full of lean proteins and fiber-rich foods. Lean proteins stabilize your blood sugar, keep you full and signal your body to burn fat. High-fiber foods (think beans, brown rice, oats and barley) bind excess cholesterol in the gut and move it out through your digestive tract.

—Ariane Hundt, M.S., New York City-based nutritionist and personal trainer