Raising HDL Levels

High density cholesterol, or HDL, is the "good" cholesterol because having high levels can reduce the risk for heart disease and stroke. HDL cholesterol cleans out low density cholesterol, or LDL, the "bad" cholesterol, from the bloodstream. It does this by picking up the excess LDL and transporting it back to the liver where it is removed from the body.

What is the ideal HDL level?

HDL Cholesterol Level	HDL Cholesterol Category
Less than 40 mg/dL	A major risk factor for heart disease
40–59 mg/dL	The higher, the better
60 mg/dL and higher	Considered protective against heart disease

How do I raise my HDL level?
There are some simple and powerful methods for accomplishing this goal.

- **Exercise.** A healthy goal is 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity exercise. It is good to have a mix of aerobic and resistance training. Check with your doctor regarding any limitations.
- **Quit tobacco use.** Quitting smoking also helps the HDL cholesterol work more effectively in sweeping out the LDL cholesterol from the body.
- **Reduce sugar in the diet.** High-sugar diets impact HDL levels in a negative way.
- **Eat heart-healthy fats.** Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats are heart-healthy fats. Omega-3 fatty acids are included in this category.
- **Avoid trans fat.** Trans fat can raise LDL cholesterol and lower HDL cholesterol. This kind of fat is found in many processed and fried foods. Read the labels and avoid foods with these words in the ingredient list: hydrogenated; partially hydrogenated; shortening.
- **Lose weight, if overweight.**

Foods that may help increase your HDL:
- Fatty fish (salmon, tuna, mackerel) – eat twice a week
- Various nuts
- Avocados
- Olive, canola, and peanut oils
- Olives
- Beans and legumes (black beans, black-eyed peas, lentils, etc.)
- Whole grain products
- High fiber fruits (prunes, apples, pears)

Watch serving sizes and count calories. Some of these contain higher calories in smaller amounts because of the healthy fat they contain. Including them in your diet in proper amounts may help increase your HDL level and improve your heart health.

Source: Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

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