

What are my alternatives to pills?

Most people thinking about avoiding pills immediately talk about diet. However, it may surprise you, but diet is only a small part of the story. **It is possible to reduce Total and LDL cholesterol by up to 20% and increase HDL** for most people by taking the actions described on the next pages.

Only around 1/5 of the cholesterol in our bodies comes from what we eat- 4/5 is manufactured in the liver, using fat, carbohydrate and protein from our food.

So, reducing cholesterol using lifestyle has to be about more than just what we eat.

Nutrition and diet:

There are 2 ways we can change the amount of dietary cholesterol in our blood:



We can eat less fat- less meat (particularly red meat, including pork), less dairy – yoghurt, cheese, full fat milk so that there is less fat in our digestive system.



While at the same time increasing fibre in our diet- particularly soluble fibre- because this increases the time it takes for cholesterol to pass through the body.

Soluble fibre is found in beans, chick peas, lentils, broccoli, oats, pears

Losing weight- aiming for a healthy BMI- can also make a difference.

Getting to a healthy weight and staying there are important.

If you know you are not eating as healthily as you could, just changing what you eat might be enough.

Or follow Dr David Unwin's diet, or the Freshwell diet. Both are clear, easy to follow and have budget options and meal planners.

[Dr David Unwin Low Carb Diet Sheet \(lowcarbprogram.com\)](http://lowcarbprogram.com)

[Home - Freshwell Low Carb Project \(lowcarbfreshwell.com\)](http://lowcarbfreshwell.com)

Sleep:



Maybe this is not so obvious- but the right amount of sleep, generally 7-8 hours a sleep each night increases our HDL levels.

Spending more than 8 hours, or less than 5 hours asleep every night leads to lower HDL. And we need a good level of HDL to carry out recycling of used and stored cholesterol.

Exercise:



Exercise is all good, and there are different types of exercise.

Aerobic (where you get breathless)

Strength (working muscles to make them stronger)

Flexibility (where you stretch and bend)

Having a programme where you do some of each type of exercise each week is definitely the best.

Not only does it lower the 'bad' LDL cholesterol, but it also increases the 'good' HDL- and reduces your Triglycerides because you're using more energy. A marvellous 3 in 1 benefit. Regular exercise can bring about a 13% reduction in cholesterol.

[Differential Effects of Aerobic Exercise, Resistance Training and Combined Exercise Modalities on Cholesterol and the Lipid Profile: Review, Synthesis and Recommendations | Sports Medicine \(springer.com\)](#)

Reduce Alcohol:

Less alcohol is better.

1-2 alcoholic drinks per week is best.

UK guidelines are no more than 14 units per week- but this is a maximum, not a minimum.

Quit Smoking:

The evidence for this is clear. There is no other advice other than to stop smoking. It takes as little as 15 seconds after the first inhalation for arteries to tighten- so every puff of a cigarette increases heart attack and stroke risk.

Vaping: the jury is still out. But any vape that contains nicotine may cause constriction of arteries.

Reduce Stress:

We know that stress increases cortisol, increases adrenaline, and gets the fright-or-flight response going.

Both cortisol and adrenaline are known to increase LDL (bad cholesterol) and lower HDL (good cholesterol). And chronic stress can lead to the liver pumping out triglycerides into the blood stream- and we know that continually raised Triglycerides increase the risk of heart disease.

So while we don't have exact numbers- it's difficult to do experiments on stressed individuals in an ethical way- it is clear that taking action in our lives to reduce stress and promote times of relaxation can only be good.

