

## An Update on Good Cholesterol

**L**ipids are fatty substances that are essential component of the human body. They are important for generating and storing energy, forming hormones and vitamin D, building cell membranes and providing insulation to nerve conduction and prevent heat loss.

Lipids are not water soluble, and therefore they cannot travel in the bloodstream easily. Therefore, lipids are transported in the bloodstream through water soluble capsules called Lipoproteins. These Lipoproteins travel easily in the circulation.

If you are trying to avoid heart disease, you should keep tabs on your blood cholesterol values, especially your low density lipoprotein or LDL (bad cholesterol). Too much LDL in the bloodstream can create artery clogging plaques, increase your risk of heart attack and stroke.

Your cholesterol report also called lipid profile or lipid panel includes high density lipoprotein or HDL. HDL, often referred to as good cholesterol since people with high HDL levels are less likely to develop cardiovascular disease.

HDL level less than 40 for men and less than 50 for women is considered low. However higher the level of HDL, better it is. For men more than 50 and for women more than 60 is considered a good value.

Higher HDL levels are often linked with behavior like eating, healthy diet, getting regular exercise and not smoking.

However recent studies suggest that simply having a high HDL level is not protective. It is important to have high HDL that is functioning well. HDL functionality may be more important than HDL level.

There are ways to improve your HDL functionality. Regular aerobic exercise, healthy diet, weight loss, and quitting smoking have been shown to improve HDL function. Omega-3 fatty acids may also help.

Also, high levels of HDL may not always be protective. In some cases, genetic mutations can cause high HDL that is dysfunctional and actually increase cardiovascular risk. If you have very high HDL (above 80), it is worth getting a cardiac risk assessment.

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