

# Physical Activity and Cholesterol Lowering Medications

## Inactivity – A MAJOR Risk Factor for Heart Disease

According to the U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health, **inactive people are nearly twice as likely to develop heart disease as those who are more active.** This is true even if you have no other conditions or habits that increase your risk for heart disease.



To reduce the risk of heart disease, adults need only do about 30 minutes of moderate activity on most, and preferably all, days of the week. **This level of activity can also lower your chances of having high blood pressure, diabetes, and other risk factors related to heart disease.**

Heart disease occurs when the arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle become hardened and narrowed, due to a buildup of plaque on the arteries' inner walls. Plaque is the accumulation of fat, cholesterol, and other substances. As plaque continues to build up in the arteries, blood flow to the heart is reduced. Heart disease can lead to a heart attack. A heart attack happens when a cholesterol-rich plaque bursts and releases its contents into the bloodstream. This causes a blood clot to form over the plaque, totally blocking blood flow through the artery and preventing vital oxygen and nutrients from getting to the heart. A heart attack can cause permanent damage to the heart muscle.

Heart disease is a serious disease—and too often, a fatal one. It is the number one killer of Americans, with 500,000 people in the United States dying of heart disease each year. Many others with heart problems become permanently disabled. That's why it's so vital to take action to prevent this disease. Getting regular physical activity should be part of everyone's heart disease prevention program.

Getting regular physical activity is an especially important part of your healthy heart program, because physical activity both directly reduces your heart disease risk *and* reduces your chances of developing other risk factors for heart disease. For example, regular physical activity may reduce LDL (bad) cholesterol, increase HDL (good) cholesterol, and lower high blood pressure. It can also protect your heart by helping to prevent and control diabetes. Finally, physical activity can help you to lose excess weight or stay at your desirable weight, which will also help to lower your risk of heart disease.

## Cholesterol-lowering medications

There are a number of cholesterol-lowering medications available by prescription. These medications primarily reduce LDL (bad) cholesterol, and some also increase HDL (good) cholesterol and reduce triglycerides. However, ALL of these medications have potential for serious side effects, including gastrointestinal, liver and muscle problems. They may also interfere with other medications you are taking. If you have an LDL level of 130 mg/dL or greater, you will generally need to take an LDL-lowering medicine. If your LDL level is 100 to 129 mg/dL, your doctor will consider all the facts of your case in deciding whether to prescribe medication for further LDL lowering or for high triglycerides and/or low HDL if they are present. If your doctor prescribes medicine, you also will need to:

- Follow your cholesterol-lowering diet.
- **Be more physically active.**
- Lose weight if overweight.
- Control all of your other heart disease risk factors, including smoking, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

**Taking all these steps together may lessen the amount of medicine you need or make the medicine work better--and that reduces your risk for a heart attack while also reducing the risk and/or severity of the medications' side effects, not to mention the significant cost associated with these medications.**