Does having a lower body fat percentage reduce cholesterol?

There are two primary types of cholesterol that the everyday consumer should know about: LDL ("bad cholesterol") and HDL ("good cholesterol"). If too much LDL cholesterol circulates in the blood, it can slowly build up in the walls of the arteries that lead to the heart and brain. Medical experts think HDL tends to carry cholesterol away from the arteries and back to the liver, to be passed out of the body.

Having a lower body fat percentage does not have a direct impact on levels of blood lipids. However, many of the activities required to lower your body fat percentage, such as improved diet and increased exercise, do improve blood cholesterol levels.

Eating a diet high in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables is a good start to lowering blood cholesterol. Most fruits and vegetables contain a good amount of fiber. Soluble fiber has been shown to help lower blood cholesterol. Foods high in soluble fiber include oat bran, oatmeal, beans, peas, rice bran, barley, citrus fruits, and strawberries.

Another good tip to improve your cholesterol level is to limit the amount of cholesterol in foods you eat. Aim for no more than 300 mg of dietary cholesterol per day, or 200 mg per day if you have heart disease. The most concentrated sources of cholesterol include organ meats, egg yolks, and whole-milk products. Use lean cuts of meat, egg substitutes, and skim milk instead.

Exercise is also important. Research has shown that 30 to 60 minutes of brisk activity each day can improve cholesterol levels by raising HDL or "good" cholesterol.

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Sources: www.mayoclinic.com; www.americanheart.org