

## Experts Recommend Natural Ways to Lower Cholesterol

(ARA) - Heart disease continues to top the charts as America's greatest health threat, and unhealthy cholesterol levels are a major risk factor. The good news is there are natural and well-studied options that can help get people on track before prescription therapies become the only resort to reduce cholesterol. In fact, many health care professionals are urging people to make simple lifestyle changes first.

### *The Exercise Factor*

"Get moving," says Los Angeles-based registered dietitian Sandra Marin. According to the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, only about one-third of adults get the minimum amount of recommended exercise per week. "It is crucial to create an exercise routine - 30 to 60 minutes, three to five times per week is generally recommended. For beginners, get your doctor's approval before starting a new exercise regimen and start slow with 20 minute sessions, gradually working up to the recommended amount," Marin states. "Most importantly, stick to a plan that fits into your lifestyle."



### *Diet Dos*

In addition to physical fitness, studies increasingly show that diet is at the heart of the matter when it comes to cholesterol. Dietary practices shown to help reduce cholesterol include choosing fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and low-fat dairy products. Avoid foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol such as full-fat dairy products, red meats, tropical oils and fried foods. "Eating a variety of healthy foods and avoiding excessive calorie intake is essential to maintaining healthy cholesterol levels," Marin says.

### *Natural Cholesterol Busters*

If exercise and diet still aren't enough, consider adding some natural cholesterol reducers such as foods high in viscous soluble fiber and plant sterols and stanols. "These are both well-studied in their ability to reduce total cholesterol and are recommended by U.S. government guidelines," states Chicago-based researcher Dr. Kevin Maki, PhD, who specializes in cholesterol management.

### *The Bottom Line*

Studies have shown that a heart health plan consisting of a healthy diet and exercise can decrease LDL cholesterol by about 5 to 10 percent. If that's not enough, consider adding natural cholesterol busters like viscous soluble fiber and plant sterols and stanols.

All experts agree that it is best to work with a health care professional to develop an individualized treatment program, but a healthy lifestyle is the foundation for cholesterol health.