BOOST HEART HEALTH

Getting your cholesterol under control in just four weeks

Geelong Advertiser · 14 Jul 2026 · Lyndi Cohen Lyndi Cohen is an accredited practising dietitian and author of Your Weight is Not the Problem

If you've just had a blood test and your cholesterol is higher than you'd like, the temptation can be there to panic and cut out every food you enjoy or to start googling "cholesterol lowering superfood detox cleanse".



Start most days with oats to help keep cholesterol in check. Picture: iStock

But what you should do is far more effective – and is backed by research. By focusing on simple, high-impact habits that actually move the needle, you don't have to give up your favourite foods.

Not all cholesterol is 'bad'. Your body needs some cholesterol to build cells and regulate your hormones. But when your LDL cholesterol (the "bad" cholesterol) is too high and your HDL cholesterol ("good") is too low, that's when we can take action.

As a dietitian and nutritionist, I've helped thousands of people improve cholesterol levels, without dieting.

Here is my four-week cholesterol lowering plan.

*Note: always consult with your doctor about cholesterol concerns.

Even a moderate increase in soluble fibre (5-10g) can significantly reduce LDL cholesterol, according to analysis published in The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. Adding oats regularly into your diet has shown in multiple studies to reduce "bad" cholesterol.

• Eat oats most mornings, as porridge or try overnight oats
• Add 1-2 tbsp chia or ground flaxseed
• Add lentils, beans or chickpeas at least three times a week
• Include barley where possible, easily added to soups or stew
• Aim to eat two pieces of fruit daily (apples, pears, berries)

Fat is not bad for your heart. It's the type of fat that matters.

Swapping processed foods which contain saturated fat for unsaturated fat options can help improve cholesterol levels and reduce cardiovascular risk. Plus, studies consistently show a Mediterranean-style diet with healthy fats like extra virgin olive oil and nuts, may reduce cardiovascular events.

• Use extra virgin olive oil as your go-to fat source

• Have a handful of nuts daily as a snack

• Eat oily fish two to three times per week • Cook at home more from fresh foods, rather than getting takeout or fried options

Consistency beats extremism. Sticking to a month of healthier eating is far more beneficial than one week of perfect eating (followed by falling off the bandwagon).

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Exercise that increases your heart rate can reduce bad cholesterol and improve lipid profile, according to a meta-analysis in Sports Medicine. Not only that, but regularly exercising can also improve insulin sensitivity and reduce inflammation.

• 30 minutes of walking most days, to start or end your day

• Aim for two or more strength sessions weekly

• Take the stairs, park further away, get off a bus stop earlier.

The key to better cholesterol goes beyond what you eat. Not sleeping enough can have a noticeable effect on blood lipids while drinking alcohol is also linked with significantly poorer heart health. Plus, chronic stress can impact cholesterol and cardiovascular wellbeing.

Aim for seven to nine hours of quality sleep per night.

Experiment with not drinking for at least 30 days to notice the mental and physical benefits of more energy, improved mood and better sleep quality

Try mindfulness techniques to improve stress recovery.

Your cholesterol levels won’t drop dramatically overnight, but they can meaningfully shift in this time. The research in cholesterol-lowering diets consistently shows increasing soluble fibre, swapping to better fat quality and exercising regularly can shift LDL levels within weeks. More than that, within four weeks, you’ll likely feel a lot better: more energised, less restricted and in control of your habits.

It is also important not to obsess over one bad meal or your weight alone, without looking at the bigger picture. Cholesterol is more nuanced. Genetics, hormones and stress all play a role. While losing weight can have a positive impact on cholesterol levels, extreme dieting often leads to weight regain. Slow, steady and sustainable is the game.