

# Consumer health: Niacin to boost your HDL, 'good,' cholesterol

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Niacin is an important B vitamin that may raise your HDL, ("good"), cholesterol. Find out if you should talk to your health care provider about taking niacin alone or with cholesterol medications.

Niacin, a B vitamin, has long been used to increase [high-density lipoprotein](#) (HDL) cholesterol—the "good" cholesterol that helps remove low-density lipoprotein (LDL), the "bad" cholesterol from your bloodstream.

But niacin isn't for everyone. People who take niacin in addition to common cholesterol medications see very little additional benefit. And niacin can cause uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous side effects.

## What is niacin?

Niacin (nicotinic acid) is a B vitamin that's used by your body to turn food into energy. Niacin also helps keep your nervous system, digestive system and skin healthy. That's why niacin is often a part of a daily multivitamin, though most people get enough niacin from the food they eat.

When it's used as a treatment to increase your HDL cholesterol or correct a [vitamin deficiency](#), niacin is sold in higher doses that are prescribed by your [health care provider](#). Prescription-strength niacin includes such drugs as Niacor and Niaspan.

Niacin is also available as an over-the-counter supplement. Supplements sold over-the-counter are not regulated like prescription medications. The ingredients, formulations and effects of over-the-counter niacin can vary widely.

Don't take niacin without discussing it with your health care provider first because [niacin](#) can cause serious side effects when taken in high doses.

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