

CHOLESTEROL

What you can do to lower your level

What is cholesterol?

Most of the cholesterol in your body is made by your liver from saturated fat in your diet. Some cholesterol also comes from foods such as eggs, meats and dairy products.

Why is a high cholesterol level unhealthy?

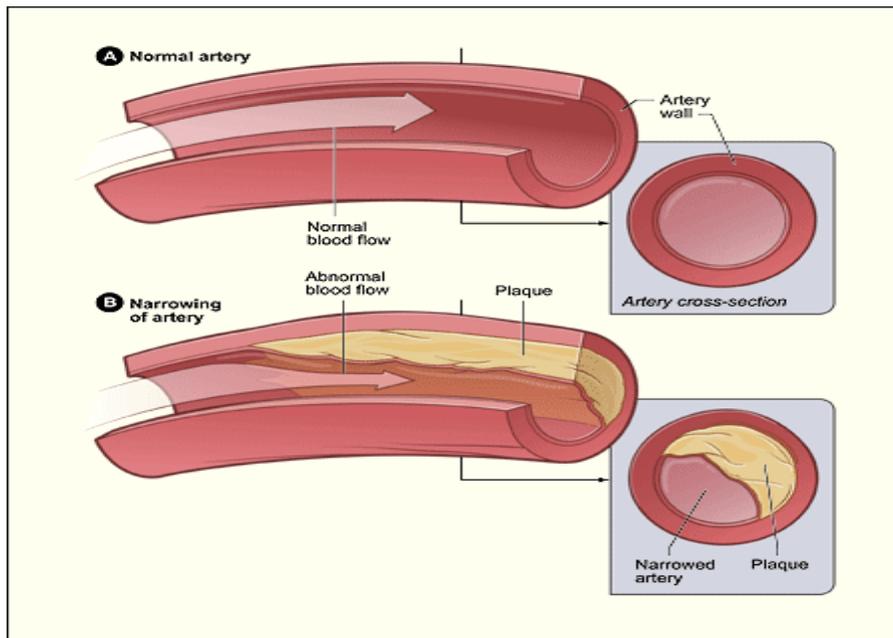
While some cholesterol is needed for good health, too much cholesterol in your blood can raise your risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

The extra cholesterol in your blood may be stored in your arteries (blood vessels) and cause them to narrow. (This is called atherosclerosis.) Large deposits of cholesterol can completely block an artery, so the blood can't flow through.

If an artery that supplies blood to your heart becomes blocked, a heart attack can occur. If an artery that supplies blood to your brain becomes blocked, a stroke can occur.

When should I start having my cholesterol level checked?

Men aged 35 to 65 and women aged 45 to 65 should have their cholesterol checked periodically. Depending on what your cholesterol level is and what other risk factors for heart disease you have (see below), you may need to have it checked more often.



Risk factors for heart disease:

- Having already had a heart attack
- Being a man 45 years of age or older
- Having a father or brother who had heart disease before he was 55
- Being a woman 55 years of age or older, or being a woman under 40 going through menopause without taking estrogen.
- Having a mother or sister who had heart disease before she was 65
- Smoking cigarettes
- Having high blood pressure or diabetes
- Being very overweight
- Being inactive

Are there different types of cholesterol?

Cholesterol travels through the blood in different types of packages, called lipoproteins.

Low-density lipoproteins (LDL) deliver cholesterol to the body. High-density lipoproteins (HDL) remove cholesterol from the bloodstream.

This is why too much LDL cholesterol is bad for the body, while the HDL form is good. It is the balance between the types of cholesterol that tells you what your cholesterol level means (see the box to the far right).

For example, if your total cholesterol level is high because of a high LDL level, you may be at higher risk of heart disease or stroke. If your total level is high only because of a high HDL level, you are probably not at higher risk.

How is High Blood Cholesterol diagnosed?

High blood cholesterol is diagnosed by checking levels of cholesterol in your blood. It is best to have a blood test called a lipoprotein profile to measure your cholesterol levels. Most people will need to not eat or drink anything (to fast) for 9-12 hours before taking the test.

The lipoprotein profile will give information about your:

- Total cholesterol
- Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) bad cholesterol: the main source of cholesterol buildup and blockage in the arteries.
- High-density lipoprotein (HDL) good cholesterol: the good cholesterol that helps keep cholesterol from building up in arteries.
- Triglycerides: another form of fat in your blood.

If it is not possible to get a lipoprotein profile done, knowing your total cholesterol and HDL cholesterol can give you a general idea about your cholesterol levels. Testing for total and HDL cholesterol does not require fasting. If your total cholesterol is 200 mg/dL or more, or if your HDL is less than 40 mg/dL, you will need to have a lipoprotein profile done.

Cholesterol levels are measured in milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per deciliter (dL) of blood. See how your cholesterol numbers compare to the tables below.

Total Cholesterol Level

Less than 200 mg/dL
200-239 mg/dL
240 mg/dL and above

Total Cholesterol category

Desirable, Best
Borderline high
High, means you are at increased risk for heart disease

LDL Cholesterol Level

Less than 100 mg/dL
100-129 mg/dL
130-159 mg/dL
160-189 mg/dL
190 mg/dL and above

LDL Cholesterol Category

Optimal, Best
Near optimal, above optimal
Borderline high
High, you are at higher risk for heart disease
Very high, you are at highest risk for heart disease

HDL Cholesterol Level

Less than 40 mg/dL
40-59 mg/dL
60 mg/dL and above
Reduces your risk of heart disease

HDL Cholesterol Category

A major risk factor for heart disease
The higher, the better
Considered protective against heart disease

Triglycerides can also raise your risk for heart disease. If you have levels that are borderline high (150-199 mg/dL) or high (200 mg/dL or more), you may need treatment. Things that can increase triglyceride levels include:

- Overweight
- Physical inactivity
- Cigarette smoking
- Excessive alcohol use
- Very high carbohydrate diet
- Certain disease and drugs
- Genetic disorders

What can I do to improve my cholesterol level?

You can do a number of things to improve your cholesterol level. Eating healthy food can help lower your LDL cholesterol level. You can lower your risk by quitting smoking if you smoke, losing weight if you are overweight and exercising.

What sort of foods are healthy choices?

Lowering your cholesterol level by eating healthy foods is easier than you might think. You don't have to give up your favorite foods. Just eat them less often. Also try sometimes substituting healthier choices.

Tips for eating smart:

- Limit saturated fats, like dairy fats (in ice cream and butter) and palm and coconut oil (in baked goods).
- Limit high-cholesterol foods, like egg yolks, organ meats (such as liver) and shellfish.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables.
- Eat more broiled and grilled fish and skinless chicken breasts.
- Choose lean cuts when you eat beef, pork and lamb. Also eat smaller portions.
- Eat a variety of fiber-rich foods, like oats, dark breads and apples.
- Choose low-fat or nonfat dairy products.
- Avoid fried foods.

What about medicine to lower cholesterol?

Depending on your risk factors, if healthy eating and exercise don't work after about 6 months to 1 year, your doctor may suggest medicine to lower your cholesterol level.

Several types of medicines are used to lower high cholesterol levels:

- Bile acid absorbers (Examples are: Questran)
- Lipoprotein synthesis inhibitors (Examples are: Nicobid)
- Coenzyme A reductase inhibitors (STATINS) (Examples are: Lipitor, Pravachol, Zocor, Mevacor, Vytorin)
- Cholesterol Inhibitors (Examples are: Zetia)
- Omega 3 Fatty acids
- Fibrin acid derivatives (Examples are: Lopid, Tricor)

Your doctor will decide which type of medicine is right for you.

Try these:

Fish; poultry without the skin;
Lean beef, pork and lamb

Nonfat or low-fat milk

Sherbet, sorbet

Egg whites

Raw or steamed vegetables

Baked potatoes

Clear soups

Unsaturated vegetable oils, olive,
Corn, or canola oil

Angel food cake

Pretzels, air-popped popcorn

Pancakes or cereal with nonfat milk,
Bagels, English muffins

Instead of these:

Sausage, bacon, or
organ meats (live liver)

Whole milk

Ice cream

Egg yolks

Buttered or fried vegetables

French fries

Creamed soups

Saturated fats: butter, palm oil,
coconut oil, lard, or bacon fat

Cheesecake

Potato chips

Pastries, doughnuts