

Managing your cholesterol

You probably hear a lot about cholesterol: good and bad, high and low. But why is it so important to your health and what can you do to keep your levels under control?



What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a soft, wax-like substance found in the fats in your blood and in all of your body's cells. Your body uses cholesterol to keep you healthy, but too much cholesterol in the blood can hurt the heart and blood vessels.¹

There are two types of cholesterol:

- LDL, or “bad” cholesterol. This type mixes with other substances in the blood to form plaque. Plaque can stick to the blood vessels, causing them to become hard and narrow and making it difficult for blood to pass through. It can also break off and form clots that can block blood vessels, leading to a heart attack or stroke.¹
- HDL, or “good” cholesterol. This type keeps bad cholesterol from building up inside the blood vessels because it helps remove it from the body.¹

Another substance in the blood—triglycerides—can also clog your arteries.¹

Testing for cholesterol

Your doctor can test your blood to find out your cholesterol levels. Talk to your healthcare provider to find out how often you need to have your cholesterol checked. To prepare for this test, you may need to fast (not eat food and drink only water) for 9–12 hours before your visit. When you get your results, you'll get different numbers measuring LDL cholesterol, HDL cholesterol, triglycerides and total cholesterol.

What numbers are right for you?

Discuss your results with your healthcare provider. If your numbers are high, ask about ways to lower your cholesterol.

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute classifies cholesterol using these categories:²

Desirable Cholesterol Levels ^{1,2}	
Total cholesterol	Less than 200 mg/dL
LDL (“bad”) cholesterol	Less than 100 mg/dL
HDL (“good”) cholesterol	Greater than or equal to 60 mg/dL
Triglycerides	Less than 150 mg/dL

What happens when your cholesterol is high?

There are typically no symptoms of high cholesterol, so it’s very important to get your cholesterol tested. High cholesterol may:¹

- Increase your risk of heart and blood vessel disease
- Increase your risk of heart attack and stroke

Questions to ask my doctor: _____

You can make healthy changes

If you have high cholesterol or want to reduce your risk of having it, there are steps you can take to manage your levels.¹

- **Eat a healthy diet.** Stay away from saturated and trans fats, which are found in many processed, deep-fried foods and animal products. Instead, eat a heart-healthy diet with foods rich in:
 - Healthy monounsaturated fats, such as fish, olive oil, canola oil, avocados and nuts
 - Fiber, such as fruits, vegetables and whole grainsAsk your healthcare provider about the Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLC) diet for lowering LDL cholesterol.
- **Get regular physical activity.** Focus on getting aerobic exercise—the kind that gets your heart pumping, like walking briskly and jogging. Talk to your healthcare provider before beginning an exercise program.
- **Keep a healthy body weight.** Lose weight if you're overweight. Talk to your healthcare provider about the best plan for you.
- **Quit smoking. Stay away from tobacco smoke.** Ask your healthcare provider about programs to help you quit.
- **Talk to your healthcare provider about medicines.** Your doctor may prescribe medicines to help manage cholesterol levels. Take your medicines exactly as your doctor says. Don't stop taking them without checking with your doctor first. If you have questions about your medicines and how to take them, ask your pharmacist or call your doctor.

References

¹National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/blood-cholesterol

²Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/cholesterol/cholesterol_screening.htm

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