

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 the box on the next page), you may need to have it checked more often.

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's the balance between the types of cholesterol that tells you what your cholesterol level means (see the box to the lower 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're probably not at higher risk.

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're overweight and exercising.

Risk factors for heart disease

- Having already had a heart attack
- Abnormal Total Cholesterol, HDL, LDL, Triglycerides
- 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

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.

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 (such as Questran, etc.), lipoprotein synthesis inhibitors (such as Nicobid, etc.), coenzyme A reductase inhibitors (such as Mevacor, etc.) and fibric acid derivatives (such as Lopid, etc). Your doctor will decide which type of medicine is right for you.

Total cholesterol level

- Less than 200 is best.
- Between 200 to 239 is borderline high.
- 240 or more means you're at increased risk for heart disease.

LDL cholesterol level

- Less than 130 is best.

- Between 130 to 159 is borderline high.
- 160 or more means you're at higher risk for heart disease.

HDL cholesterol level

- Less than 35 means you're at higher risk for heart disease.
- 60 or higher reduces your risk of heart disease.

For more information

Write the National Cholesterol Education Program at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, Information Center, PO Box 30105, Bethesda, MD 20824-0105, visit their Web site at www.nhlbi.nih.gov or call 301-592-8573.

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 or 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.

Try these:	Instead of these:
• Fish; poultry without the skin; lean beef, pork, and lamb	• Sausage, bacon, organ meats (like liver)
• Nonfat or low-fat milk	• Whole milk
• Sherbet, sorbet	• Ice cream
• Egg whites	• Egg yolks
• Raw or steamed vegetables	• Buttered or fried vegetables
• Baked potatoes	• French fries
• Clear soups	• Creamed soups
• Unsaturated vegetable oils: olive, corn, canola	• Saturated fats: butter, coconut oil, palm oil, lard, bacon fat
• Angel food cake	• Cheesecake
• Pretzels, air-popped popcorn	• Potato chips
• Pancakes or cereal with nonfat milk	• Pastries, doughnuts, bagels, English muffins