

Let's Talk About Cholesterol



If you have high blood cholesterol, you have a greater chance of getting coronary heart disease or having a heart attack or stroke. Coronary heart disease is the leading cause of death in people over 65. It can also make doing things like walking harder to do.

High cholesterol does not have symptoms. You might not know you have it.

By lowering your cholesterol, you lower your chances of heart disease. You also increase your chances of doing things you enjoy as you get older.

Coronary (KORE-uh-naree) arteries are blood vessels that carry blood from your heart to other areas of your body.

Cholesterol (cole-ES-ter-all) is a waxy fatty film found in your blood. Your body needs some cholesterol, but it makes all that it needs. In coronary heart disease, cholesterol builds up on the walls of your coronary arteries. This can slow down or stop the flow of blood to your heart.

What Should My Cholesterol Level Be?

The amount of cholesterol in your blood can be measured by a blood test. Talk to your doctor about when you should take this test.

General rules:

- An LDL cholesterol level of less than 100 mg/dL is considered very good.
- An LDL cholesterol level of 160 mg/dL or higher is considered high.

Talk to your doctor about your cholesterol goals.

There are two types of cholesterol—HDL cholesterol and LDL cholesterol. LDL cholesterol is called “bad cholesterol.” It can stick to the walls of your arteries and lead to heart disease. HDL cholesterol is called “good cholesterol” because it protects you from heart disease.

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What Can I Do to Lower My Cholesterol?

As you get older, your cholesterol levels rise. Your risk of high cholesterol is even higher if you eat a diet high in fat and cholesterol. If you are overweight or if you don't exercise enough, you are at higher risk. Work with your doctor to find ways to lower your cholesterol. Set goals for yourself.

Exercise regularly. Try to be active for 30 minutes on most days.	Talk to your doctor before exercising. Some ways to exercise more include taking a walk every day, swimming, yard work, dancing, playing golf, and bowling.
Eat a diet low in fat.	Avoid fried foods and limit pork and beef. Instead, eat broiled, baked, or grilled fish, chicken, or turkey. Remove chicken and turkey skin before eating. Trim fat from meat before eating. Use low-fat milk and cheese.
Avoid foods high in cholesterol.	Cholesterol is found in foods that come from animals, such as egg yolks and organ meats. (Egg whites contain no cholesterol.)
Lose extra weight.	Become more active. Eat 5–9 servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Read food labels and control the amount of food you eat. Here are some examples of serving sizes: 1/2 cup rice or pasta; 1 small piece of fruit; 3/4 cup fruit juice; 1 cup of milk; 2 ounces of cheese (about the size of a domino); 2–3 ounces of meat, poultry, or fish (about the size of a deck of cards).
Eat more fiber.	Snack on fruits and vegetables instead of chips, cookies, and other high-fat foods. Choose whole grain breads and pastas. Add foods like black beans or kidney beans to soups or salads instead of meat.
Stop smoking and limit the amount of alcohol you drink.	Smoking and drinking are both linked to heart disease.
Take cholesterol-lowering medicines if your doctor prescribes them.	

