



High Cholesterol

What is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a substance that is found in the blood. Everyone has some, it is needed for good health. The problem is, people sometimes have too much cholesterol. Compared to people with normal cholesterol, people with high cholesterol have a higher risk of heart attack, stroke and other health problems. The higher your cholesterol, the higher the risk of these problems.

Are there different types of cholesterol?

Yes, there are different types of cholesterol. If you were to get a cholesterol test, you might hear your doctor talk about:

- **Total Cholesterol** - Measure of the total amount of cholesterol in your blood
- **LDL Cholesterol** - Often referred to as the “bad” cholesterol
- **HDL Cholesterol** - Often referred to as the “good” cholesterol
- **Non-HDL Cholesterol** - Total cholesterol minus your HDL cholesterol
- **Triglycerides** - Triglycerides are not cholesterol, they are another type of fat. *(Having high triglycerides also seems to increase the risk of heart attack or stroke)*

What should my numbers be?

Discuss what your numbers should be with your doctor. Different people need different goals. In general, people who do not already have heart disease, should aim for:

- **Total Cholesterol** - Below 200
- **LDL Cholesterol** - Below 100, or much lower if at risk of heart attack or stroke
- **HDL Cholesterol** - Above 60
- **Non-HDL Cholesterol** - Below 160, or much lower if at risk of heart attack or stroke
- **Triglycerides** - Below 150

What should I do if my doctor tells me I have high cholesterol?

Ask your doctor what your overall risk of heart attack and stroke is. Just having high cholesterol is not always a reason to worry. Having high cholesterol is just one of many things that can increase your risk of heart attack and stroke. Other things that increase your risk:

- Smoking
- High Blood Pressure
- A diet that is not heart-healthy *(a heart-healthy diet includes fruits, vegetables, fiber and health fats)*
- Having a parent/sibling who had heart disease at a young age *(younger than 55 for males, younger than 65 for females)*
- Older age

Should I take medicine to lower my cholesterol?

Not everyone with high cholesterol needs medicine. Your doctor will decide if you need them based on your age, family history and other health concerns.

There are different types of medicines that can lower cholesterol. Some help the body make less cholesterol. Some keep the body from absorbing cholesterol from foods. And some, help your body get rid of cholesterol faster. The medicines most often used to treat high cholesterol are called “statins”.

You should probably take a statin if you:

- Already had a heart attack or stroke
- Have known heart disease
- Have diabetes
- Have a condition called “peripheral artery disease” *(when leg arteries become clogged with fatty deposits)*
- Have an “abdominal aortic aneurysm” *(widening of the main artery in the belly)*

Can I lower my cholesterol without medicines?

Yes, you can help lower your cholesterol by:

- Avoiding red meat, butter, fried foods and excess alcohol *(to lower LDL)*
- Avoiding sugary foods, fried foods and excess alcohol *(to lower triglycerides)*
- If you are overweight, it can help to lose weight
- Try to get regular, physical activity *(even gentle forms of exercise, like walking, are good for your health)*
- Avoiding foods high in saturated fat *(full-fat dairy, pastries, cookies, cakes, muffins, chips, crackers, candy, tropical oils, such as palm, palm kernel and coconut)*