



What You Should Know About Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance found in the bloodstream and in all your body's cells and is needed for the body to function normally. The body makes all the cholesterol it needs. Cholesterol circulates in the bloodstream but cannot travel by itself. As with oil and water, cholesterol (which is fatty) and blood (which is watery) do not mix. So cholesterol travels in packages called lipoproteins, which have fat (lipid) inside and protein outside.

What Affects Cholesterol Levels?

Various factors can cause unhealthy cholesterol levels. Some of the factors cannot be changed but most can be modified. The factors you can't change are heredity, age and gender. Those under your control include **diet**, **overweight** and **physical inactivity**.

How Does Diet Affect Cholesterol?

Three nutrients in your diet make **LDL levels rise**:

- » **Saturated fat**, a type of fat found mostly in foods that come from animals;
- » **Trans fat**, raises "bad" (LDL) cholesterol, and lowers "good" (HDL) cholesterol (*found mostly in foods made with hydrogenated oils and fats such as stick margarine, crackers, and french fries*); and
- » **Cholesterol**, which comes only from animal products.

But it's important to know that saturated fat raises your LDL cholesterol level more than anything else in your diet. Diets with too much saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol are the main cause for high levels of blood cholesterol—a leading contributor to the high rate of heart attacks among Americans.

Knowing our Cholesterol Level

You can have high cholesterol and not realize it. Most of the 65 million Americans with high cholesterol have no symptoms. So it's important to have your blood cholesterol levels checked. All adults age 20 and older should have their cholesterol levels checked at least once every 5 years. If you have an elevated cholesterol, you'll need to have it tested more often. Talk with your doctor to find out how often is best for you.

What You Can Do...

- » Cut back on foods that are high in saturated fats, such as fatty cuts of meat, fried foods, whole milk, cheese, butter, margarine, oils, lard, and creams.
- » Cut back on snacks and desserts that are high in trans fats, such as candy, cookies, doughnuts, muffins, pastries and pies.
- » Cut back on food with lots of cholesterol, such as egg yolks and whole eggs.
- » Eat more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- » Increase physical activity. Most health benefits occur with at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of moderate intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking. Additional benefits occur with more physical activity.
- » If you smoke, stop smoking.

Different Kinds of Cholesterol

Type of Cholesterol	Description	Optimal Level
Total Cholesterol	Helps build cells and produce hormones, but too much in the blood can build up on artery walls, forming plaque	< 200 mg/dL
Low Density Lipoprotein (LDL)	Causes the build up in your arteries and causes blockages of your arteries that cause disease	< 100 mg/dL
High Density Lipoprotein (HDL)	Helps keep the arteries from clogging up and protects against disease	40 mg/dL or higher
Triglycerides	A form of fat, high levels often mean a high total cholesterol, including high LDL (bad) cholesterol and low HDL (good) cholesterol	< 150 mg/dL