



Controlling Your Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a waxy substance that travels in your bloodstream. When you have high cholesterol, it builds up in the walls of your blood vessels. This makes the blood vessels narrower and blood flow decrease. Then you could have a heart attack or a stroke.

Good and Bad Cholesterol

Lipids are fats, and blood is mostly water. Fat and water don't mix. So we need lipoproteins (lipids packaged in a protein shell) to carry the lipids. The protein shell lets lipoproteins enter the bloodstream, carrying their cargo of lipids. There are two main kinds of lipoproteins:

- LDL (low-density lipoprotein) is known as “bad cholesterol.” Its cargo is mainly cholesterol. It delivers this cholesterol to body cells. If there's too much LDL cholesterol, it can build up in artery walls. This increases your risk of heart disease and stroke.
- HDL (high-density lipoprotein) is known as “good cholesterol.” It consists mostly of a protein shell. This lipoprotein collects excess cholesterol that LDLs have left behind on blood vessel walls. That's why high levels of HDL cholesterol can decrease your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Controlling Cholesterol Levels

Total cholesterol includes LDL and HDL cholesterol, as well as other fats in the bloodstream. If your total cholesterol is high, follow the steps below to help lower your total cholesterol level.

Eat Less Unhealthy Fat

- Cut back on saturated fats and trans (also called hydrogenated) fats. A diet that's high in these fats increases your bad cholesterol. It's not enough to just cut back on foods containing cholesterol.
- Eat about 2 servings of fish per week. Most fish contain omega-3 fatty acids. These help lower blood cholesterol.
- Eat more whole grains and soluble fiber (such as oat bran). These lower overall cholesterol.

Be Active

- Choose an activity you enjoy. Walking, swimming, and riding a bike are some good ways to be active.
- Start at a level where you feel comfortable. Increase your time and pace a little each week.
- Work up to 30 minutes on most days. You can break this up into three 10-minute periods.
- Remember, some activity is better than none.
- If you haven't been exercising regularly, start slowly. Check with your doctor to make sure the exercise plan is right for you.

Quit Smoking

- Quitting smoking can improve your lipid levels. It also lowers your risk for heart disease and stroke.

Medication

Many people need medication to get their LDL levels to a safe level. Medication to lower cholesterol levels is effective and safe. (But taking medication is not a substitute for exercise or watching your diet!) Your doctor can tell you whether you might benefit from a cholesterol-lowering medication.

Healthy Cholesterol Targets

These are common targets. Ask your doctor for target numbers that are right for you.

Total cholesterol: Under 200

Your target number: _____

HDL: 40 or higher for men, 50 or higher for women

Your target number: _____

LDL: Under 100

Your target number: _____

Triglycerides: Under 150

Your target number: _____



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