

**What is cholesterol?**

Cholesterol is the name given to a group of substances in your blood that move fat particles throughout your body.

Cholesterol is a necessary component of cells. Excess levels deposit in blood vessels of your heart and blood vessels. This causes narrowing of vessels and decreased blood flow through the area. When enough of the vessel is blocked, this can cause a heart attack or stroke.

**What do the different types of cholesterol mean?**

- HDL, or “good cholesterol” cleans cholesterol from tissues and blood vessels. This helps prevent heart and blood vessel disease, or “atherosclerosis.”

- LDL, or “bad cholesterol” brings cholesterol to tissues.

- Total cholesterol is all of the cholesterol in your blood.

- Non-HDL cholesterol is your total minus your HDL.

- Triglycerides are not cholesterol. They are often measured with cholesterol. They are another type of fat that increases the risk of heart attacks and strokes.

**But I feel fine. Why do I need screening?**

Most people with high cholesterol do not have symptoms early. Symptoms usually develop after years of disease. They may include leg or chest pain with movement, heart attacks, and strokes To prevent complications, it is important to identify and treat high cholesterol early.

**What is my goal cholesterol? Do I need treatment? (1)**

Your goal level is based on your personal risk of heart disease. A general guide for those without heart disease is:

Total cholesterol: less than 200.

LDL: less than 130; less for those at risk of heart attacks/strokes.

HDL: above 60.

Non-HDL below 160; less for those at risk of heart attacks/strokes.

Triglycerides: less than 150.

Decision to start medical treatment is based on your overall risk for heart disease. It is not based only on numbers.

**How can I lower my cholesterol? (2,3,4)**

A heart healthy diet has been shown to have significant effects on cholesterol levels. An Important change is to eat less saturated fat. Saturated fats are found in red meats, butter/cheese and fried food. Eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains is also important.

Fish oil can help lower triglyceride levels. Eating 1-2 servings of oily fish weekly can reduce triglyceride levels. Oily fish include mackerel, salmon, anchovies, and sardines.1 gram of fish oil daily can help if you do not eat enough fish.

Eating a diet high in soy protein can help lower LDL and triglyceride levels. This can also raise HDL levels. Soy has low saturated fat and high unsaturated fat levels.

It is not recommended to replace normal protein with soy protein. It is best to add soy protein into your diet.

Weight loss also can lower cholesterol levels. It is recommended that one get 30 minutes of exercise at least 5 days per week. Additionally, it is estimated that there are 3500 calories in one pound. Removing 500-1000 calories per day from your diet helps lose 1-2 pounds per week.

It can take 6-12 months to see the effects of lifestyle changes. However, the effects are lifelong and benefit your health in other ways. It is important that once you start, you continue. If you stop, your cholesterol levels may rise again.

**What else can I do to lower my risk of heart disease? (1)**

The risk of heart attacks and strokes depends on many things other than cholesterol levels. Other things that may increase your risk include:

* Smoking.
* High blood pressure (hypertension)
* Family history of heart disease in a sibling or parent at a young age.
  + Less than 55 for males.
  + Less than 65 for females.
* Advanced age.
* An unhealthy diet high in sugars, unhealthy fats and lacking in fruits, vegetables, fiber, and healthy fats.

If your risk of heart disease is high enough, your doctor may recommend starting medications. There are several different types of medications. If you have side effects on one type, don’t just stop the medication. It is important to let your doctor know.

References.

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