

Basics of Cholesterol and Triglycerides

Cholesterol is a form of fat found in the blood and all the body's cells. It is naturally produced by the body and also comes from the food we eat. Cholesterol is used by the cells to keep us healthy; however, extra cholesterol can put us at risk for heart disease and stroke. Cholesterol levels can be affected by age, gender, family history, and diet.

HDL, LDL and triglycerides

Cholesterol cannot dissolve in the blood, so it uses carriers called lipoproteins to travel to the body's cells.

One-fourth to one-third of blood cholesterol is carried using high-density lipoprotein (**HDL**), also known as "good" cholesterol. HDL is believed to carry cholesterol away from the arteries and protect against heart disease and stroke. Low levels of HDL increase the risk of heart disease, so the higher your HDL level the better.

Low-density lipoprotein (**LDL**), also called "bad" cholesterol, is the main carrier of harmful cholesterol in your blood. LDL can join with fats and other substances to make plaque. This plaque can then build up on the inner walls of the arteries causing them to become clogged and reduce blood flow. A blood clot could get caught in these narrowed arteries and cause a heart attack or stroke.

Triglycerides are the most common type of fat in the body and also serve as a major energy source. Like cholesterol, triglycerides are made by the body and come from food sources. High levels of triglycerides raise your risk for heart disease and stroke.

My cholesterol levels

It is important to know your cholesterol levels. Ask your health care provider if your current cholesterol levels are within a healthy range.

My total cholesterol level is:

My HDL level is:

My LDL level is:

My triglyceride level is:

Date of my last cholesterol test:

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Testing and steps to lowering cholesterol levels

Ask your health care provider how often you should have your cholesterol checked and what your target numbers are. If your cholesterol levels are above your target talk with your health care provider about what you can do to lower them. Here are a few general tips to lowering cholesterol.

- Limit foods high in saturated fat, trans fat, and/or cholesterol (butter, cheese, fatty meat, whole-milk dairy products, and egg yolks).
- Be more active. Try for 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week.
- Increase the amount of foods low in saturated fats and cholesterol, and high in fiber (fruit, vegetables, whole grains, beans).
- Lose extra weight.
- Quit smoking.
- Take any cholesterol medications as directed by your health care provider.

Cooking tips to reduce cholesterol

- Trim all visible fat from meat and remove skin from poultry (chicken or turkey) before cooking.
- Baste with wine, fruit juice, or marinade instead of drippings.
- Brown or sauté foods using vegetable oil spray.
- Broil or grill instead of frying.
- Use a rack to drain fat when roasting, broiling or baking.
- Use egg whites or egg substitute instead of eggs in recipes.
- Use low-fat cheese in place of regular cheese when possible.

Questions to ask your health care provider

Take these questions to your health care provider to learn more about your specific cholesterol goals.

- What do my cholesterol numbers mean?
- What are my cholesterol goals for HDL, LDL, triglycerides?
- How often should I have my cholesterol levels checked?
- What type of foods should I eat or avoid eating?
- Do I need to lose weight? If so, how much?