

HOW CHOLESTEROL PUTS YOUR HEART AT RISK

Cholesterol is a waxy substance in the bloodstream that is necessary for your body to function properly. It is produced by your liver and is also found in many foods, especially animal products. Too much cholesterol in the bloodstream can create a buildup called **plaque** that eventually narrows or blocks arteries, leading to chest pain, heart disease or even a heart attack.

The Good, the Bad, the Triglycerides

When you have a total cholesterol test, also called a lipoprotein profile, you'll receive numbers that show levels of the following in your bloodstream. All levels are measured as milligrams per deciliter of blood, abbreviated as mg/dL.

- **Total cholesterol.** This number indicates how much cholesterol is circulating in the bloodstream.
- **Low-density lipoprotein (LDL).** Sometimes called "bad cholesterol," LDL causes plaque buildup in arteries.
- **High-density lipoprotein (HDL).** Also called "good cholesterol," HDL removes cholesterol from the blood and carries it back to the liver, where it is eliminated.
- **Triglycerides.** When you eat more calories than you need, they are converted into triglycerides and stored in fat cells. High triglyceride levels have been linked with the development of heart disease and diabetes.



Can I Eat Eggs?

One egg has 213 mg of cholesterol, making eggs difficult to fit into the recommended 300 mg of daily dietary cholesterol. However, some studies have shown that egg consumption does not raise blood cholesterol levels to any great degree. In addition, eggs are rich in vitamins that may help lower heart disease risk. However, people who have diabetes or who have trouble controlling their cholesterol levels should limit themselves to egg whites.

3 Ways to Live a Low-Cholesterol Life

Whether you are trying to lower your cholesterol, already suffer from heart disease or are simply trying to live healthier and protect your heart, these changes will get you on track.

1. EAT a heart-healthy diet.

Cholesterol is found in meat, dairy products, eggs, baked goods and many prepackaged or instant foods. However, when you read food labels, don't look at cholesterol content alone. Research has shown that cholesterol consumption only affects blood cholesterol slightly. Rather, it's eating too much fat that really drives those numbers up.

Plus, it's not just **how much** fat you consume that affects your cholesterol levels, it's the **kind** of fat. Put simply, there are "bad" fats that increase your heart disease risk and "good" fats that can help lower it.

Types of fat:

Monounsaturated. Found in olives, olive oil, avocados, and most nuts and their oils, this good fat lowers LDL and raises HDL.

Polyunsaturated. Corn, soybean, safflower and cottonseed oils and fish contain these fats. They lower LDL and raise HDL.

Saturated. These are the fats that you need to limit in your diet. They are found mainly in animal products such as meat and dairy, and they raise your total cholesterol level.

Trans-fats. Found in margarine, shortening, and fried and fast foods, these oils have recently been found to be a true culprit in raising LDL. Watch for the words "hydrogenated" or "partially hydrogenated" on food labels.

A simple rule: If an oil is liquid at room temperature, it most likely contains good fats. Substances that are solid or semisolid at room temperature often contain bad fats.



2. MOVE your body.

The experts agree: Lack of physical activity is the main reason why more than 60 percent of Americans are overweight or obese, and this adds to high blood cholesterol levels. Regular exercise helps to raise HDL and lower LDL numbers. It also helps you lose weight, manage stress and sleep better, all a boost to heart health.

According to the National Cholesterol Education program, 30 minutes of exercise on most days is best. Don't worry if you can't afford fancy equipment or a gym membership — a brisk walk and some vigorous housework or yard work will also do the trick.

3. AVOID bad habits. Smoking cigarettes lowers HDL cholesterol levels and also is one of the major risk factors for heart disease that you can control. If you smoke, there are medications and support groups that can help you quit. Talk with your doctor.

If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. Some studies have shown that one or two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women may raise HDL levels. However, drinking alcohol brings other health dangers, and the American Heart Association warns against increasing your alcohol consumption or starting to drink if you don't already do so.

