

CHOLESTEROL

Your Guide to Low-Cholesterol Living

Know Your Numbers

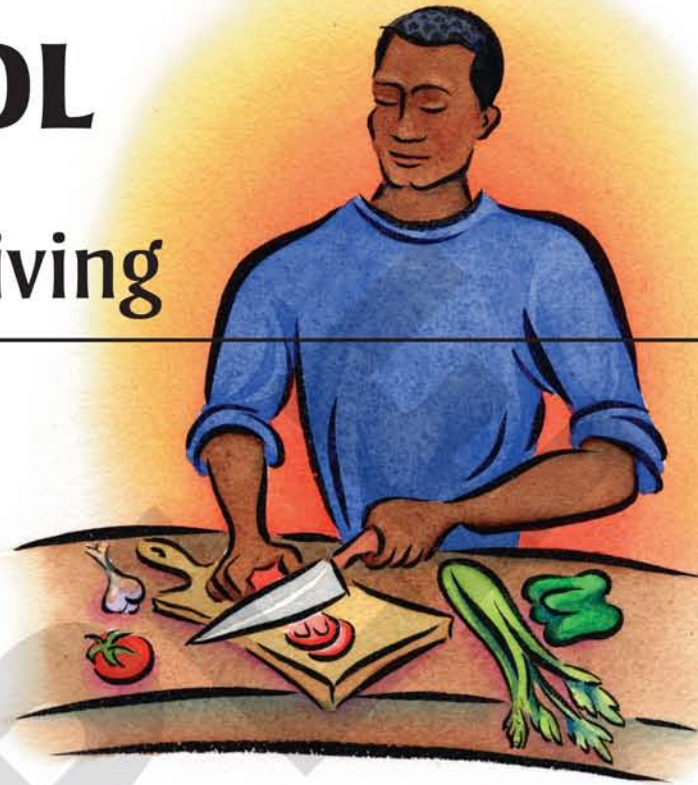
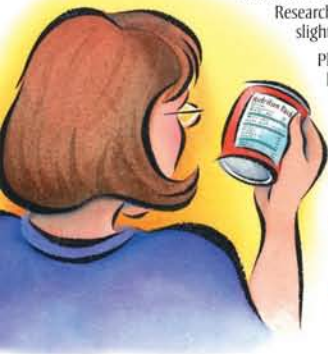
Healthy people over age 20 should have a cholesterol test every five years. You may need to be tested more often if you have high cholesterol or other risk factors for heart disease.

Keys to 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.



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.

- Normal: 200 mg/dL or below
- Borderline high: 200–239 mg/dL
- High: 240 mg/dL or above

LOW-DENSITY LIPOPROTEIN (LDL)

Sometimes called "bad cholesterol," LDL causes plaque buildup in arteries. The higher your LDL level, the higher your risk for heart disease.

- Low: Below 130 mg/dL
- High: 160 mg/dL or above

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. The higher your HDL level, the more protection you have against heart disease.

- Low: Below 40 mg/dL
- High: 60 mg/dL or above

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.

- Normal: Less than 150 mg/dL
- Borderline high: 150–199 mg/dL
- High: 200–499 mg/dL

Medications for Lowering Cholesterol

There are several cholesterol-lowering drugs, but the most frequently prescribed are called statins. Statins work with the liver to reduce cholesterol production and also allow the liver to remove more cholesterol from the bloodstream. Studies have shown that statins can reduce LDL levels by up to 40 percent and reduce the risk of a fatal heart attack.

Keep in mind: Medication is most effective when it's coupled with healthy lifestyle choices.

Keep Moving to Lower Your Numbers

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. 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.

Quit for your heart's sake. 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.



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. Moderate egg consumption is fine in most cases; however, people who have diabetes or who have trouble controlling their cholesterol levels should limit themselves to egg whites.

