Keeping Healthy: Taking Care of Your Cholesterol: Brief Version

Cholesterol is a fatty substance in your body. Cholesterol can be both helpful and harmful to your body. On the good side, it helps build the hormones and nerve cells your body needs. But when you have too much cholesterol, the walls of your blood vessels can thicken. This can cause heart disease, heart attacks, and strokes.

Measuring Cholesterol

When you get your cholesterol checked, your healthcare provider will tell you how high your cholesterol is.

If your **total cholesterol** is

   less than 200, that is healthy.
   200 to 239, it is a little too high.
   240 or above, it is too high.

Your healthcare provider may also check the 2 main types of cholesterol in your blood. One type is HDL or "good" cholesterol. (You can think of "H" for "healthy" cholesterol.) The other type is LDL or "bad" cholesterol (think of "L" for "lousy" cholesterol).

   HDL helps prevent heart disease. It helps your body get rid of cholesterol.
   LDL leaves fat on the inside of the blood vessels. When you have too much LDL, you have a higher chance of heart disease.

It's good to have high HDL and low LDL.

If your **HDL** is

   60 or higher, it lowers your risk of heart disease.
   less than 40, it increases your risk of heart disease.

The level of **LDL** that is healthy for you depends on your risk of heart disease:

   If your risk is low, an LDL less than 160 is recommended.
   If you have a medium risk, you should try to have an LDL less than 130.
   If you have a high risk or you have heart disease or diabetes, you need to try to get your LDL below 100.

Ask your provider about your risk for heart disease. This will help you know what

your LDL goal should be.

Keeping Your Cholesterol Low

Most of the time, you can take care of your cholesterol by eating right and getting the exercise you need.

It's important to eat healthy foods to keep a healthy weight.

Eat fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains every day.
Eat less fat. Stay away from saturated fat, like that in butter and meat.
Use oils like sunflower, soybean, safflower, canola, olive, and corn. Stay away from palm and coconut oil.
Eat skinless chicken, turkey, and fish instead of a lot of red meat.
If you eat red meat, cut off any fat. Choose the lowest-fat ground beef.

It also helps to:

Check food labels for fat and cholesterol. Choose the foods with less fat per serving.
Take the skin off chicken and turkey before you cook it.
Use egg whites instead of whole eggs.
Drink skim (nonfat) or 1% milk instead of whole milk. You get all the nutrition that is in whole milk and less fat.
Instead of regular sour cream, use yogurt, cottage cheese, or sour cream that is low-fat or nonfat.

Follow your healthcare provider's advice for exercise.

You may want to swim, jog, walk, or bicycle.
You should exercise at least 30 minutes most days of the week.

High cholesterol may be a problem in your family. Know your family history. Talk about it with your healthcare provider.

Remember, to take care of your cholesterol:

Eat healthy.
Exercise often.
Check your cholesterol every year.
Do not smoke. Smoking cigarettes lowers your HDL. It makes it more likely that you will have a heart attack.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

Developed by McKesson Corporation

Special Instructions:

Adult Health Advisor