Know Your Cholesterol Numbers

- Checklist for Lowering Your Cholesterol
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- LDL and HDL
Lowering Your Cholesterol

CHECKLIST

☐ **Cut down on dietary fat.** The USDA 2005 Dietary Guidelines recommend a total daily fat intake of 20 to 30 percent of calories for adults.

☐ **Avoid foods high in saturated fats**, such as prime beef; “dark meat” poultry and poultry skin; butter and other whole-milk dairy products; and tropical oils such as coconut, palm and palm kernel. The USDA Dietary Guidelines say that only 10 percent of daily calories should come from saturated fat.

☐ **Limit your intake of trans fats** to less than one percent of your daily calories. Trans fats are found in hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated vegetable oils that are used to make shortening and commercially prepared baked goods, snack foods, fried foods, and margarine.

☐ **Limit intake of high cholesterol foods** such as eggs, butter and cheese. Consume less than 200 mg of cholesterol per day.

☐ **Replace most saturated fats** (butter, lard) with polyunsaturated oil (such as safflower or soybean oil) and monounsaturated oils (such as olive oil). These oils should account for no more than 7 percent of your daily calories.
Misconceptions about Cholesterol

1 Using margarine instead of butter will help lower my cholesterol.

Both margarine and butter are high in fat, so use both in moderation. From a dietary perspective, the major factor affecting blood cholesterol is how much saturated fat is in the food. Most soft or liquid margarines have less saturated fat and are preferable to the stick forms for a heart-healthy diet. It’s best to select trans fat-free margarines. Eat all fatty foods in moderation.

2 Thin people don’t have to worry about high cholesterol.

Overweight people are more likely to have high cholesterol from eating too many fatty foods, but thin people should also have their cholesterol checked regularly. Often people who don’t gain weight easily are less aware of how much saturated fat they eat. Nobody can “eat anything they want” and stay heart healthy.

3 My doctor hasn’t said anything about my cholesterol, so I don’t have to worry.

Your health is your responsibility. Make sure that you have a blood cholesterol test and learn how to interpret all the numbers, including HDL (good) cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol and triglyceride levels. If you’re in a high or borderline-high range, discuss options with your health care provider. You may be able to control the levels by eating a diet lower in saturated fat and cholesterol, getting 30-60 minutes of physical activity on most days and quitting smoking. If lifestyle changes alone don’t work, your physician may prescribe a cholesterol-lowering medication.

4 Since the nutrition label on my favorite food says there’s no cholesterol, I can be sure that it’s a “heart-healthy” choice.

Nutrition labels on food are very helpful when choosing heart-healthy foods, but you need to know what to look for. Many “low-cholesterol” foods contain high levels of saturated fat or trans fatty acids - both of which contribute to high blood cholesterol. Even foods that claim to be “low-fat” may have a higher fat content than expected. Look for the amount of saturated fat, total fat, cholesterol and total calories in a serving of the product. Also check how much a serving is. Often it’s smaller than you think. The first ingredient listed is the one used most in the product, so choose products where fats and oils appear later in the ingredient listing. The Food and Drug Administration requires that foods be labeled for trans fats. Trans fats are found in variable amounts in most foods with partially hydrogenated oils such as baked goods, fried foods and some margarines and dairy products.
5 Since I started taking medication for my high cholesterol, I don’t have to worry about what I eat.

Unless your cholesterol is dangerously high, it’s best to try to reduce it by changing your diet. Modern medications have come a long way in helping to control blood cholesterol levels, but making lifestyle changes along with taking medication is the best way to help prevent heart disease. It’s also very important to take your medication exactly as your doctor has instructed so it can work most efficiently.

6 I recently read that eggs aren’t so bad for your cholesterol after all, so I guess I can go back to having my two eggs for breakfast every morning.

One egg contains about 213 milligrams of dietary cholesterol. That’s a lot given that the daily recommended cholesterol limit is 300 milligrams. An egg a day can fit within heart-healthy guidelines only if cholesterol from other sources, such as meats, poultry and dairy products, is limited. If you’re going to eat an egg every morning, substitute vegetables for some of the meat, or drink your coffee without half-and-half.

7 I’m a woman so I don’t have to worry. High cholesterol is a man’s problem.

Premenopausal women are usually protected from high LDL (bad) levels of cholesterol, because the female hormone estrogen tends to raise HDL (good) cholesterol levels. Postmenopausal women may find that even a heart-healthy diet and regular exercise aren’t enough to keep their cholesterol from rising. If you’re approaching menopause, it’s especially important to have your cholesterol checked and talk with your doctor about your options.

8 You don’t need to have your cholesterol checked until you reach middle age.

It’s a good idea to start having your cholesterol checked at an early age. Even children, especially those in families with a history of heart disease, can have high cholesterol levels. And evidence exists that these children are at greater risk for developing heart disease as adults. Lack of exercise, poor dietary habits and genetics can all affect a child’s cholesterol levels.
Cholesterol Questions to Ask Your Doctor

ABOUT BLOOD CHOLESTEROL

- What do my cholesterol numbers mean?
- How often should I have my levels checked?
- How does exercise affect my cholesterol level?
- How does smoking affect my cholesterol level?
- What are my cholesterol goals?
- How long will it take to reach my cholesterol goals?
- Will I need cholesterol-lowering medicine?
- Do I need to lose weight? If so, how much?
- What type of foods should I eat?

ABOUT DRUG TREATMENT

- What kind of medicine should I take?
- Can I take the generic form of the medicine?
- What should I know about the medicine?
- What are the side effects?
- How do I know if it’s working?
- How can I remember when to take the medication?
- What if I forget to take a medicine?
- Should I avoid any foods or other medicines?
- Can I drink alcohol?
- How long will I need to take my medicine?
What’s the Difference?

**LDL: Why is LDL “bad”?**

Low density lipoprotein carries cholesterol through the bloodstream, deposits cholesterol where cells need it and leaves the residue on arterial walls. When too much LDL cholesterol circulates in the blood, the residue builds up on the arteries that feed the heart and brain. This plaque, a thick, hard deposit, can clog the arteries that lead to heart attacks. Think “lousy” for LDL.

**HDL: Why is HDL “good”?**

High-density lipoprotein picks up cholesterol as it circulates in the bloodstream and brings it back to the liver for reprocessing or excretion. HDL cholesterol can help protect you from heart disease. HDL cholesterol removes LDL cholesterol from the body. Think “healthy” for HDL.

**Triglycerides**

Triglycerides are the chemical form of most fats in your body. They come from food and are also made in your body. The body converts fat to tryglycerides so that the stored fat can be used for energy. People with high triglycerides often have high total cholesterol and an increased risk of heart disease.