

Understanding Cholesterol

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance that is found in your bloodstream and in your cells. It's important because it keeps your cells healthy. But too much cholesterol can be bad for your health. Combined with other substances, it can form plaque (a thick, hard deposit), as seen to the right. Plaque clogs your arteries, which can lead to heart attack or stroke.

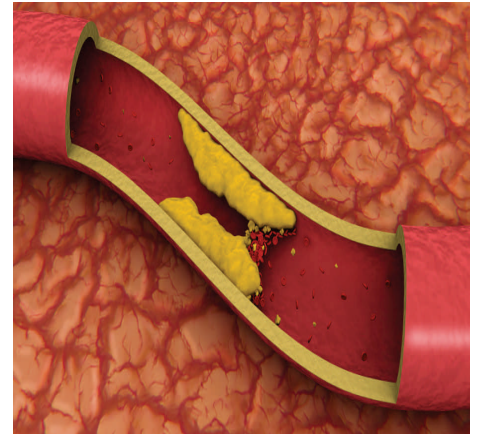
What are the signs and symptoms of high cholesterol?

High cholesterol has no symptoms. The only way to tell if you have it is by getting a blood test. Ask your doctor for a cholesterol test, and get retested every five years. Your doctor may suggest getting tested more often if you have a family history or other risk factors.

How do you manage high cholesterol?

You can lower your cholesterol by making several lifestyle changes, such as eating healthy, exercising, and losing weight. To prevent high cholesterol, follow these tips:

- Eat a healthy diet that includes lots of fruits, vegetables, fish, whole grains, and reduced fat dairy products.
- Limit saturated fats, like fatty meats, butter, and whole milk.
- Limit cholesterol intake to less than 300 mg/day.
- Exercise at least 30 minutes each day.
- Control your weight.
- Avoid smoking (call 1-800-NO-BUTTS to get information on how to quit)
- Limit alcoholic drinks to one per day.
- Schedule regular cholesterol tests with your doctor.
- Find ways to manage your stress.



Risk Factors

The following may increase your chances of getting high cholesterol:

- Family history
- Smoking
- Physical inactivity
- Overweight and obesity
- High fat diet
- Age
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure

Healthy Cholesterol

Total cholesterol: less than 200mg

HDL (high density lipoprotein), also known as “good” cholesterol: greater than 60mg

LDL (low density lipoprotein), also known as “bad” cholesterol: less than 100mg

Triglycerides: less than 150mg

Lifestyle changes are helpful in managing your cholesterol, but they may not always be enough. Some people may need to take additional medication to lower their cholesterol. Talk to your doctor to come up with the plan that's best for you.

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