



High Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a soft, fat-like substance. It is found in the blood and in the body's cells. A high cholesterol level is bad because cholesterol can build up in the walls of the arteries that bring blood to the heart and brain. This narrows the arteries and reduces blood flow through them. If a blood clot forms and blocks blood flow, it can cause a heart attack or stroke.

High cholesterol has no symptoms, and many people have it without knowing it. It's important to find out what your cholesterol levels are so you can lower them if you need to. Having a healthy cholesterol level is important for all people. Everyone age 20 and older should have their cholesterol measured at least once every five years. If you're at a higher risk level or you have other risk factors, have your cholesterol checked more often.

The best way to have your cholesterol measured is with a lipoprotein profile. This is a blood test that's administered after a 9 – 12-hour fast. It gives information about total cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol, and HDL (good) cholesterol, as well as triglycerides (blood fats). All of these are measured in milligrams per deciliter of blood (mg/dL).

You can reduce unhealthy cholesterol levels by eating foods low in saturated fats, cholesterol, and trans fats. Exercise and weight loss can also help. If you have tried reducing cholesterol through diet and exercise and you still have trouble, your doctor may prescribe medications.

Fats that raise cholesterol

A diet high in saturated fats, trans fats, and dietary cholesterol tends to raise total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol.

Fats that Raise Cholesterol	Sources	Examples
Dietary cholesterol	Foods from animals	Meats, egg yolks, dairy products, organ meats, fish, and poultry
Saturated fats	Foods from animals	Whole milk, cream, ice cream, whole-milk cheeses, butter, and meat
	Certain plant oils	Palm, palm kernel, and coconut oils
Trans fats	Hydrogenated oils	French fries, donuts, cookies

Fats that lower cholesterol

Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats tend to lower blood cholesterol, when used instead of saturated fats in the diet. In general, plant oils are usually high in polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. They're normally liquid at room temperature. Try to use vegetable oils and liquid or tub margarine, with 2 grams or less saturated fat per tablespoon, instead of butter.

Fats that Lower Cholesterol	Sources	Examples
Polyunsaturated fats	Certain plant oils	Soy, safflower, corn and sunflower-seed oils
Monounsaturated fats	Certain plant oils	Olive, canola, and peanut oils

Source: American Heart Association

To learn more about controlling your risk factors, visit americanheart.org.