



Controlling Cholesterol: The Basics

Controlling your cholesterol is important for preventing heart disease. Read on to learn about what cholesterol is, cholesterol goals, and more.

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance made by your liver. Your body needs some cholesterol to make vitamin D, hormones, and substances that help you to digest your food. Cholesterol can also be found in some of the foods that you eat, such as eggs, meat, and whole-fat dairy products.

The cholesterol that your body makes is carried through your blood by two types of *lipoproteins*:

Low-density lipoprotein cholesterol
LDL-C, the “bad” cholesterol
High amounts can lead to buildup of cholesterol in blood vessels that carry blood from your heart to your body – this can cause heart disease

High-density lipoprotein cholesterol
HDL-C, the “good” cholesterol

Helps your body to get rid of bad cholesterol in the blood

Did you know?



1 in 3
American adults
has high cholesterol

Among people who
have high cholesterol:



2 in 3 don't have
their cholesterol
under control



Half don't get
treatment for their
high cholesterol

Know your numbers!



Your healthcare provider will talk with you about cholesterol goals that are appropriate for you. Cholesterol is measured in milligrams (mg) per deciliter (dL) of blood. The optimal goals for most people are:

- **Total cholesterol:** less than 200 mg/dL
- **LDL-C:** less than 100 mg/dL
- **HDL-C:** more than 40 mg/dL for men; more than 50 mg/dL for women

Your LDL-C goal may change depending on how many heart disease *risk factors* you have. Risk factors are medical conditions or habits that make a person more likely to develop a disease. Risk factors for heart disease include smoking, high blood pressure (more than 140/90 mm Hg), family history of early heart disease, low HDL-C, and age (45 years or older if you're a man and 55 years or older if you're a woman).

- **0-1 risk factor:** less than 160 mg/dL
- **2 or more risk factors:** less than 130 mg/dL
- **If you have diabetes or another risk factor that increases your risk for heart disease:** less than 100 mg/dL; less than 70 mg/dL is optional to offer even more protection against heart disease

Cholesterol goals: how to get there

Your healthcare provider will talk with you about a plan for controlling your cholesterol. Medications may be prescribed to help you reach your goals.

Lifestyle changes can help, too:

- Eat a healthful diet, including fresh fruits and vegetables, and foods that are low in saturated fat, *trans* fat, and cholesterol
- Choose foods that are low in salt or have no salt added
- Exercise regularly: Aim for 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week
- Control your weight
- Quit smoking—if you don't smoke, don't start!

REFERENCES: Grundy SM et al. *Circulation*. 2004;110(2):227-239. • Million Hearts. About heart disease & stroke. Available at: <http://millionhearts.hhs.gov/about/hds/prevention.html#Control>. • NHLBI. ATP III at-a-glance. Available at: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/cholesterol/atglance.pdf>. • NHLBI. What is cholesterol? Available at: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/hbc/>. All websites accessed September 6, 2013

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