

Just the Facts about Cholesterol Levels



Cholesterol is a waxy substance found in all parts of your body and is made in the liver and also found in foods you eat. Too much cholesterol can build up in the arteries, which can slow or even completely block the flow of blood to the heart (atherosclerosis). Arteries supply your heart with oxygen-rich blood. If the heart does not receive enough oxygen, you may have chest pain (angina), a heart attack (myocardial infarction or "MI"), or you may even die. This is the most common cause of heart disease and happens so slowly that most people are not even aware of it.



TYPES OF CHOLESTEROL

There are different types of cholesterol that should be watched and controlled. It takes approximately three months to one year to see changes in cholesterol levels.

Total Cholesterol:

A desirable total cholesterol level for adults without coronary heart disease is less than 200 mg/dl (milligrams of cholesterol per deciliter of blood). A level of 240 mg/dl or above is considered "high" cholesterol. However, even levels in the 200-239 mg/dl (classified as borderline high risk), increase heart disease risk. Total cholesterol levels can be increased by eating too much of foods with dietary cholesterol in them. Examples are butter, egg yolks, whole milk products, meat, poultry, and fish.

LDL (Remember "L" for lousy):

Your LDL cholesterol level greatly affects your risk of heart attack and indirectly, of stroke. The lower the LDL the lower the risk. In fact, it's a better gauge of risk than total blood cholesterol. LDL levels can be elevated by eating too many foods with large amounts of saturated fat such as animal fats, coconut oil, palm and palm kernel oils. Check the categories and the goals for treatment that can lower your risk of heart attack.

Risk Category	Goal
People without coronary heart disease and with fewer than two risk factors	160 mg/dl or lower
People without coronary heart disease and with two or more risk factors	130 mg/dl or lower
People with coronary heart disease	100 mg/dl or lower

HDL (Remember "H" for healthy):

HDL levels are interpreted exactly opposite that of total cholesterol. The higher the HDL the better. HDL cholesterol is good for you because it helps remove cholesterol from your blood. A HDL level under 40 mg/dl is considered too low and a level above 60 mg/dl is considered optimal against heart disease. You can increase your HDL cholesterol by exercising, losing weight, and quitting smoking.



Triglycerides:

Triglycerides are “stored fat” in your body that is carried through the blood. Eating empty calorie foods that are high in calories with low or no nutritional value can cause elevation. Some examples may be candy, pastries, and alcohol. Eating a low fat, low cholesterol diet, losing body fat, exercising regularly, and restricting alcohol generally help lower triglyceride levels. Your triglyceride level will fall into one of these categories:

Triglyceride Level	Classification
Less than 150 mg/dl	Normal
150-199 mg/dl	Borderline-high
200 - 499 mg/dl	High
500 mg/dl or higher	Very High

PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF HIGH CHOLESTEROL

Healthy Eating:

If your tests show a healthy level of cholesterol in your blood, keep up the great work! To keep your levels in the desirable range, it will be important to eat a low saturated fat, low cholesterol diet. This will help you maintain a healthy weight.

- Limit fat intake. Less than 10% of the day's total calories should come from saturated fat and only 30% of the day's calories from fat.
- Cholesterol intake per day should be less than 300 milligrams. Try to eat chicken, pork, and fish instead of red meat.
- Eat 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day. You can increase the fiber in your diet even more through trying whole grain products and beans.

A Few Easy Cooking Tips:

- Take the skin off the chicken before cooking.
- Try skim milk instead of whole milk.
- Use egg whites instead of the whole egg in cooking.

Exercise:

- Participating in physical activity on a regular basis can play a major role in lowering LDL and raising HDL cholesterol levels.
- Try to exercise at least three times a week. Start out small and work your way up to 30 minutes most days of the week.
- Pick an activity you enjoy like walking, biking, or swimming. If you enjoy the activity, you are more apt to continue the activity.

Medications:

Your doctor may prescribe cholesterol-lowering medications. Take as instructed. Remember that you should still make changes to incorporate healthy eating and physical activity in your every day life. If you are 20 and over and your cholesterol levels are normal, have your cholesterol levels checked every 5 years. If your results are abnormal have them checked as instructed by your health care provider.

**For any questions call your health care provider, or
the nurse advice line at 1-888-6-ASK-OSF.**