High Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a type of fat. Your body needs it for many things, such as making new cells. You get cholesterol from the foods you eat. And your body makes it.

Having too much cholesterol does not make you feel sick. But if cholesterol builds up in your arteries, it can block blood flow to your heart or brain and may lead to a heart attack or stroke.

Understanding your cholesterol levels

There are good and bad types of cholesterol in your blood. One type of cholesterol is LDL, or "bad" cholesterol. This needs to be lowered if it is high. It can clog arteries and lead to a heart attack or stroke.

The other type of cholesterol is HDL, or "good" cholesterol. This needs to be raised if it is low. High HDL protects against heart attack.

A simple blood test can check your total cholesterol. It also can check how much of each kind of cholesterol you have.

Is your total cholesterol too high?

It is best if your total cholesterol is less than 200. Cholesterol that is 200 to 239 is considered borderline high. Your total cholesterol is considered high if it is 240 or above.

What are your levels of good and bad cholesterol?	
"Bad" LDL cholesterol	Should be **below** 100.
"Good" HDL cholesterol	Should be **at least** 40; 60 **or above** helps lower your risk of heart attack and stroke.
Triglycerides (another type of fat found in your blood)	Should be **below** 150.

How is high cholesterol treated?

You and your doctor may decide to treat your high cholesterol without medicine. Changing some of your habits may be all you need. Eat low-fat foods. Be more active. Lose weight if you need to. If you smoke, stop. Even if you take medicine, these lifestyle changes are important.

Watch what you eat

Cut down on these foods. They raise cholesterol the most because they contain saturated fats and hydrogenated oils, which are the worst kinds of fats you can eat:

- Whole milk, whole-milk cheese, and whole-milk yogurt
- Butter, margarine with trans fat, shortening, eggs, lard, fatty meats, and chicken skin

- Coconut oil, palm oil, and cocoa butter (look for these on the food label)
- Packaged snacks, cookies, crackers, and chips
- Nondairy whipped topping and creamer

If you need help changing your diet, talk to your doctor. He or she may refer you to a registered dietitian, an expert in healthy eating.

Be more active

Aim for moderate activity at least 2½ hours a week. Walking is one of the easiest ways to be active.

Medicines

Statin medicines lower bad cholesterol. They can reduce your chances of heart attack and stroke.

Your doctor may suggest other medicines to help improve your cholesterol levels.

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