

All About Cholesterol

What is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a plaque like substance that is found naturally in your blood. There are two main types of cholesterol:

- Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol often called the bad cholesterol because high levels in the blood leads to the buildup of plaque on the artery walls.
- High-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol is called the good cholesterol because it helps carry LDL-cholesterol away from the artery walls.
- Triglycerides are not a type of cholesterol. However, they are a type of fat that is found in the blood. High triglycerides are associated with excess weight, and unhealthy lifestyle habits. Your triglyceride level is usually measured at the same time as your blood cholesterol.



How does cholesterol affect the heart?

High cholesterol is a major risk factor for the development of heart disease and stroke and can lead to a buildup of plaque in the artery walls causing your arteries to become narrow. This a condition called **atherosclerosis**. Atherosclerosis makes it difficult for blood to flow through the body and to the heart and increases your risk for heart disease.

How to maintain a healthy cholesterol level:

1. Get tested - Know your numbers! Follow these recommendations to know if you are due for a test:

- ✓ *Are you a male over 45 years old?*
- ✓ *Are you female over 55 years. old or post-menopausal?*
- ✓ *Have you been diagnosed with diabetes or high blood pressure?*
- ✓ *Do you have a family history of heart disease or stroke?*

2. Choose healthy fats - Healthy fats are found mainly in vegetable oils, nuts and fish are good fats that help to keep your heart healthy.

Limit your intake of saturated fat and trans fats. Saturated fat is found mainly in red meat and high-fat dairy products and trans fats can be found in fast foods. Both saturated and trans fats raise LDL (bad) cholesterol and lower HDL (good) cholesterol.

3. Follow a heart healthy diet - Be mindful of what you are eating. Eat more vegetables, fruit, whole grains and healthy fats.

4. Be smoke-free - Quitting will not only help to improve your health but it will also help to decrease LDL (bad) cholesterol levels.

5. Get physically active- It is recommended to get at least 150 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise every week. Regular physical activity can improve HDL (good) cholesterol levels.

6. Maintain a healthy weight - Losing and maintain a healthy weight can decrease LDL (bad) cholesterol and improve overall health.

