



HIGH CHOLESTEROL

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is waxy, fat like substance that is made in the liver. It is also in animal foods such as meats, eggs and dairy products.

Why is cholesterol important?

Cholesterol has a lot to do with whether or not a person gets heart disease. High levels raise the chance that a person will either have a heart attack or get heart disease.

How does cholesterol cause heart disease?

If there is too much cholesterol in the blood, the extra can build up on the walls of the arteries in the heart. This causes "hardening of the arteries," which makes them narrow or blocked. If blood flow to the heart is slowed a lot or blocked, the heart muscle is starved of oxygen and nutrients. If this is bad enough, it can cause chest pain. If the blood is completely blocked, this causes a heart attack. Sometimes the extra cholesterol will build up in the arteries that feed the brain. Here, they can also cause blockage, but the result is a stroke or "brain attack".

What is high cholesterol?

High cholesterol is checked by taking a blood sample after a person has been fasting (no food or drink for 9-12 hours). There are several tests that are taken. Below are the definitions of the main cholesterol numbers:

- Total cholesterol
- LDL (bad) cholesterol--the main source of cholesterol buildup and blockage in the arteries
- HDL (good) cholesterol--helps keep the arteries clear
- Triglycerides--another form of fat in your blood

Below is a table of normal and high levels of cholesterol.

<i>Total Cholesterol Level</i>	<i>Category</i>
Less than 200 mg/dL	Desirable
200-239 mg/dL	Borderline High
240 mg/dL and above	High
<i>LDL Cholesterol Level</i>	<i>LDL-Cholesterol Category</i>
Less than 100 mg/dL	Optimal
100-129 mg/dL	Near optimal/above optimal
130-159 mg/dL	Borderline high
160-189 mg/dL	High
190 mg/dL and above	Very high

HDL (good) cholesterol protects against heart disease, so higher numbers are better. Anything over 60 mg/dL is high enough to help protect from heart disease. A number less than 40 means that the chance for getting heart disease is increased.

What can be done to control cholesterol levels?

There are ways to control cholesterol to help prevent heart disease. These ways are basically the same as for heart disease. The three things that can be controlled are:

- **Diet** – saturated fat and cholesterol in foods can make your cholesterol go up. Watching saturated fat is more important. Your doctor can help you find which foods need to be avoided.
- **Weight** – being overweight is a risk factor for heart disease and can also cause high cholesterol. Losing weight, even a small amount, will improve your heart health.
- **Activity** – regular exercise can lower your bad cholesterol (LDL) and raise your good cholesterol (HDL). Being active for 30 minutes for most, if not all, days will help you lose weight and improve your heart health.
- **Medicine** – there are many medicines that can help lower cholesterol. Your doctor can give you one of these if necessary.

Two things that you do not have control over are your age and family history. As people age, their cholesterol tends to rise and they must be careful with diet and exercise. Also, people are more likely to get high cholesterol if someone in their family has it.

The saying goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Getting to your doctor and talking to him or her about high cholesterol is a good place to start. Your doctor can help you take action to avoid high cholesterol and give you medicine if needed. And regular follow up to watch your cholesterol with your doctor is a must!