



Understanding Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a waxy substance produced by your liver and found in your bloodstream and cell membranes. Cholesterol is essential to life and cell function as well as the formation of both vitamins and hormones. However, having too much cholesterol, especially LDL cholesterol (low-density lipoprotein), is a major risk factor for coronary heart disease (CHD) and stroke. *Heart disease is the number one killer of men and women in the United States, so it is important to understand how to manage it effectively.*

High cholesterol (hypercholesterolemia) can result from a diet that is overly rich in animal fats (saturated fat). When your blood contains an excess of cholesterol, it builds up in the walls of your arteries. Over time, this buildup can harden into plaque, causing narrowed or blocked arteries. The result can be a heart attack, sometimes called a myocardial infarction or MI. If the blockage occurs in a vessel that leads to the brain, then it can result in a stroke.

High blood cholesterol itself does not cause symptoms. Similar to high blood pressure, the only way to know your cholesterol numbers is to have them tested.

A simple blood test can produce this lipid profile:

Total cholesterol

- Desirable < 200 mg/dL
- Borderline high 200-239 mg dL
- High > 240 mg/dL

LDL (bad cholesterol)

- Optimal <100 mg/dL
- Near optimal 100-129 mg/dL
- Borderline high 130-159 mg/dL
- High 160-189 mg/dL
- Very high > 190 mg/dL

These ranges differ for individuals with known CHD or diabetes, so if you have either of these conditions, please speak with your doctor about the appropriate ranges for you.

While family history has a significant influence, making lifestyle changes such as improving nutrition, losing weight, and engaging in daily exercise are key to managing cholesterol. If lifestyle changes are not successful, then you should consult with your doctor about the action plan that is best for you, including the use of medications when necessary.

Sources: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/chd | www.medlineplus.gov | www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/cholesterol

Treatment Disclaimer: This poster is for education purposes, not for use in the treatment of medical conditions. It is based on skilled medical opinion as of the date of publication. However, medical science advances and changes rapidly. Furthermore, diagnosis and treatment are often complex and involve more than one disease process or medical issue to determine proper care. If you believe you may have a medical condition described in the poster, consult your doctor.

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- Maintain a healthy diet. Try to eat five servings of fruits or vegetables on a daily basis.
- With doctor approval, regular aerobic exercise helps to reduce your risk of heart disease.
- Schedule an annual visit with your primary care physician.
- Ask your doctor if you should have your lipid profile measured.