

## Cholesterol

**Cholesterol** is a waxy, fat-like substance found in your blood. Cholesterol is made by the liver and occurs naturally in all parts of the body. You can also get cholesterol by eating anything that comes from an animal. You need cholesterol to build cell walls, produce hormones and to help your brain, skin, and other organs function.

If you have too much cholesterol in your bloodstream, it can collect on vessel walls causing them to narrow. Over time this buildup keeps blood from moving freely and can cause less blood and oxygen to reach your brain and heart. This can result in a heart attack or stroke.

### Two Types of Cholesterol

**HDL** (high density lipoprotein) is known as good cholesterol. HDLs help to clear excess cholesterol from the bloodstream. **LDL** (low density lipoprotein) is the bad cholesterol that tends to form deposits on artery walls. The ideal situation to aim for is a low level of LDL cholesterol and a high level of HDL cholesterol.

### Know Your Numbers

Doctors recommend that your cholesterol stay below 200. The following are guidelines from the National Cholesterol Education program:

Blood Lipid	Desirable	Borderline	High
Total Cholesterol	< 200 mg/dL	200-239 mg/dL	>= 240 mg/dL
Low-Density Lipoproteins (LDL)	< 130 mg/dL	130-159 mg/dL	>= 160 mg/dL
High-Density Lipoproteins (HDL)	> 35 mg/dL (values >60 mg/dL are considered a negative risk factor)		
Triglycerides	< 200 mg/dL		

### What Can I do to Lower My Cholesterol Levels?

- Eat foods with less fat, saturated fat and cholesterol
- Broil, bake, roast, or poach instead of frying foods
- Eat lots of fruits and vegetables everyday
- Eat lots of cereals, breads, rice, and pasta made from whole grains, such as whole wheat bread or spaghetti.
- Exercise daily
- Lose weight if you are overweight
- Stop smoking
- Take your high blood cholesterol medicine as prescribed by your doctor
- Know your cholesterol and triglyceride levels
- Four weeks after starting a new medication or changing the dose of your current medication, have your cholesterol levels rechecked.

## Medications

Medications to lower blood cholesterol generally fall into the following categories: statins, resins, nicotinic acid, and fibrates. A new class of drugs directly blocks the absorption of cholesterol in the digestive track. This class of drug is commonly used in addition to a statin.

### References:

American Academy of Family Physicians. Cholesterol: What your level means. <http://familydoctor.org/801.xml>; accessed December 13, 2006.

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WebMD. Cholesterol Management Resources. [www.webmd.com/solutions/hs/cholesterol/faq](http://www.webmd.com/solutions/hs/cholesterol/faq) ; accessed November 21, 2006.

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