

Managing your cholesterol



**BlueCross
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Federal Employee Program.

Important Definitions

Cholesterol is a natural substance made by your liver.

Your body needs cholesterol to make hormones, cell membranes, and Vitamin D. Cholesterol is found naturally in your blood and your cells, as well as in many of the foods you eat. However, a high cholesterol level can increase your risk for heart disease and lead to serious problems such as heart attacks and stroke.

Some definitions you should know:

LDL cholesterol means “low-density lipoprotein.” LDL transports the cholesterol from the liver to the tissues of the body, which is why it is called “bad” cholesterol.

HDL cholesterol means “high-density lipoprotein.” HDL transports cholesterol from the tissues of the body to the liver where it is removed from your body, which is why it is considered “good cholesterol.”

Triglycerides are the major form of fat stored by the body. They serve as the core structure of many types of lipids (fats). Triglycerides also enter the body from the food you eat.

Total cholesterol refers to all the types of cholesterol combined.

There may be other lab results that are included to help measure your cholesterol that are not mentioned here. Please be sure to talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist if you have questions regarding those values.

Controlling Cholesterol

What is a good plan to help control cholesterol?

Lifestyle changes are an important part of controlling cholesterol. Making changes in your diet, exercise and weight will help put you on the path to better heart and overall health.

Diet

Food choices have a major impact on your cholesterol levels. Having a “heart healthy” eating plan is one that emphasizes whole foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, poultry, fish and nuts. Below are some ways to help improve your diet:

- **Cut back on trans fats**

- Trans fats are found in processed foods like snacks (crackers and chips) and baked goods (muffins, cookies and cakes) with hydrogenated oil or partially hydrogenated oil

- **Limit saturated fats**

- This type of fat is often found in animal products and certain oils that are solid at room temperature

Foods containing saturated fats include:

- Lard
- Fatback and salt pork
- High-fat meats: regular ground beef, bologna, hot dogs, sausage, bacon, steak, and spareribs
- High-fat dairy products: full-fat cheese, cream, ice cream, whole milk, 2 percent milk and sour cream
- Butter
- Cream sauces
- Gravy made with meat drippings
- Chocolate
- Coconut and coconut oil
- Poultry (chicken and turkey skin)
- Palm oil and palm kernel oil

- **Limit sugar and certain carbohydrates**

- Try to limit sweets and sugar-sweetened beverages like sodas

- Refined carbohydrates may include pastries, pasta, white rice, cake, cookies and white bread
- Too much sugar and refined carbohydrates may increase triglyceride levels

- **Eat more fiber**

- A high-soluble fiber diet can help reduce your risk of heart disease by blocking cholesterol and fats from being absorbed into the blood. Insoluble fiber helps with colon health. Some experts recommend around 25 grams of fiber per day for women and 30 grams for men. When you start eating more fiber, your belly might feel bloated, or you might have gas or cramps. You can avoid these side effects by adding fiber to your diet slowly. Some people feel worse when they eat more fiber or take fiber supplements. If you feel worse after adding more fiber to your diet, you can try decreasing the amount of fiber to see if that helps. Refer to this chart on food ideas to increase fiber in your diet.

Soluble fiber

- Beans and legumes like lentils and chickpeas
- Grains like oatmeal, oat bran and barley
- Some juices and fruits like oranges, pears, prunes and apples
- Vegetables like carrots, beets, broccoli and sweet potatoes

Insoluble fiber

- Whole grain foods
- Wheat and corn bran
- Nuts and seeds like walnuts, almonds, pistachios and sunflower seeds
- Vegetables like cabbage, kale, watercress, Brussels sprouts, peas, celery, eggplant, turnips and cauliflower



- **Choose foods with sterols and stanols**

- These help lower bad cholesterol (LDL) by working to block absorption of cholesterol from the stomach and intestines. Sterols and stanols are found naturally in fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds.
- Some people may benefit from limiting the amount of cholesterol they get from their diet. Ask your doctor what is right for you.

Limit Alcohol

Drinking too much alcohol can increase cholesterol and triglyceride levels. If you do drink alcohol, do so in moderation.

Exercise

Exercise can help improve your cholesterol readings. Try to exercise for 150 minutes per week for heart health benefits. If you have not exercised regularly for awhile, you may want to work up to this slowly. Or, try to lower the time spent on sedentary activities by taking breaks to include more active time in your day. Brisk walking, gardening, jogging and swimming are some examples. Be sure to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise program.

Weight Management

If you are overweight, losing weight can help lower your bad cholesterol (LDL) and triglycerides, while increasing your good cholesterol (HDL). Be sure to read the nutrition label on foods, as it provides the calories,

portion size and nutritional value per serving.

The nutrition label also helps you compare foods and keep track of your daily intake of food.

Nutritional Values

You can learn more about the nutritional content of different foods and drinks by reviewing the nutrition facts label. The label can tell you what one serving size is. It may include information on the amount of fats, carbohydrates, fiber, and sugar in each serving.

Nutrition Facts			
Serving Size 1 tbsp (14g)			
Servings Per Container 80			
Amount Per Serving			
Calories 50		Calories from Fat 50	
		% Daily Value	
Total Fat			9%
Saturated Fat 1.5g			8%
Trans Fat 0g			
Cholesterol 0mg			2%
Sodium 55mg			2%
Total Carbohydrate 0g			0%
Dietary Fiber 0g			0%
Sugar 0g			
Protein 0g			
Vitamin A	10%	Calcium	0%
Vitamin E	8%	Iron	0%
Vitamin C	0%		
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.			
	Calories	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Quit Tobacco Products

Quitting smoking increases your good cholesterol among other health benefits. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you need help quitting smoking. You can also visit www.smokefree.gov or call **1-800-QUIT-NOW**. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield Service Benefit Plan has a free tobacco cessation program. Visit www.fepblue.org for more information.

Medications

Sometimes, in addition to lifestyle changes, medication for cholesterol is recommended if you have very high cholesterol and a history of heart attack, stroke, diabetes or other risk factors. Ask your doctor if further treatment to lower your cholesterol is right for you.

Take your medication(s) – If your doctor has prescribed medication to lower your cholesterol, it is important that you take it as it will help reduce the risk of a heart attack and stroke.

Statins are a cholesterol lowering medicine that are commonly prescribed to prevent heart attacks, stroke and death from heart disease. Some people may benefit from statins regardless of cholesterol readings due to certain health risk factors.

Cholesterol screening is generally recommended for adults over age 40. Ask your doctor if a lipid panel is recommended to determine if statin therapy is a good option for you. Your doctor may also check your coronary artery calcium (CAC) to help decide if you would benefit from taking a statin.



Many people do well on a statin. Some people may not be able to take a statin medicine due to side effects. Statin side effects are rare and can often be managed by talking to your doctor about your options first, otherwise there may be other alternatives available that you can review with your doctor as well. Do not stop taking your medicines on your own.

Monitoring your Cholesterol

To see how well lifestyle changes and or medications are working for you, your doctor may monitor your labs. Different people will have different goals for where their cholesterol should be. Please be sure to ask your doctor about your cholesterol goals.

Sometimes you may be asked to fast (not eat or drink anything) before you get lab work done. If you eat or drink something before getting lab work done, let your doctor know as this may affect your lab results. You may not have to fast every time you get your cholesterol labs checked, so ask your doctor if you need to fast before getting labs done.



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