

What is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance that the body needs to function properly.¹ Your liver makes most of the cholesterol in your body. You also get cholesterol from foods that you eat. However your body does not need the cholesterol from your diet to work properly.¹ The amount of cholesterol in your body is measured and reported as “Total Cholesterol”. However, total cholesterol is made up of three separate components: HDL, LDL, and triglycerides. Most people know HDL cholesterol as “good cholesterol” and LDL cholesterol as “bad cholesterol”. So, the higher your HDL cholesterol levels are and the lower your LDL cholesterol levels are, the better for your health. Triglycerides are another type of cholesterol that mainly come from the amount of fat that we eat in our diets.¹ People who eat a lot of fattening foods tend to have higher levels of triglycerides.

What is High Cholesterol?

Your total cholesterol is considered borderline high if it is over 200. If your total cholesterol is over 240, then it is considered to be high.² Many people have cholesterol levels of over 300-400 and do not realize it until after they suffer a heart attack or stroke. Your doctor may also look at the individual components of your total cholesterol (HDL, LDL, and triglycerides) when determining your degree of “high cholesterol”.

If Your Body Needs Cholesterol, Why is High Cholesterol Bad?

While your body needs some cholesterol to function properly, too much cholesterol is a bad thing. If your liver makes too much cholesterol, or you eat too many foods high in cholesterol, then the excess cholesterol can form plaques on the walls of your blood vessels called arteries.¹ The plaques can build up and reduce the amount of blood that can flow through the arteries. This results in atherosclerosis or hard arteries.¹ Some arteries provide blood and oxygen to your heart and if these arteries become hard from the cholesterol plaques, then you could experience chest pain called angina.¹ Sometimes these plaques can also break open and form a blood clot and this can result in a heart attack.¹

Am I at Risk for High Cholesterol?

There are certain things in our lives that can increase our risk of high cholesterol. Diet, exercise, and weight are some of the things that we can control that affect cholesterol levels.¹ Age, gender, and family history are some things that affect our cholesterol that we cannot control.

How do I know if I Have High Cholesterol?

Unless you experience chest pain or have a heart attack, you will not know if you have high cholesterol. **Usually, there are no symptoms that go along with high cholesterol.**³ The only way to know if you have high cholesterol is to have it checked. Your cholesterol can be checked at your doctors office, a health fair, and at some specialty pharmacies.

How Can I Lower my Cholesterol if it is High?

- Do something active! Any form of exercise can help lower or maintain cholesterol at safe and normal levels. Examples include walking, riding a bike, swimming, or running. The best thing to do is find something you enjoy doing and stick with it.
- Stop smoking/chewing tobacco! This will make you feel better overall and reduce your risk of developing hard arteries.

- If your doctor prescribes cholesterol lowering medication, Take it how you are supposed to! Along with diet and exercise, medications can be very effective at controlling your cholesterol levels. Be sure to talk to your doctor or pharmacist about any side effects you may experience while taking your medications.
- Eat healthy foods! Try to eat foods low in fat and cholesterol. For more on healthy eating habits visit the following website: www.mypyramid.gov/
- Maintain a healthy body weight!

Other thoughts to consider about cholesterol:

- Around 17% of adults have high cholesterol (total cholesterol above 240)
- Over 100 million U.S. adults have cholesterol levels above 200
- More than 12 million Americans take medication to help lower cholesterol

For More Information About High Cholesterol, Visit the Following Websites:

- National Institute of Health at: http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Hbc/HBC_WhatIs.html
- American Heart Association at: <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=1516>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at: <http://www.cdc.gov/Cholesterol/about.htm>