

# What You Need to Know About Your Cholesterol

*At TotalWellness, we believe that everyone is healthy. That's right, everyone has existing healthy habits, whether getting eight hours of sleep, hanging out with friends or walking their dog.*

*We want you to figure out what healthy means to you and how you can build upon your healthy habits. So we created this series of I Am Healthy Guides to help you do just that. Because healthy is happy. It's more than just exercising and eating right. Healthy feels awesome.*

**Repeat After Us: I am healthy.**

## I AM

Two of the most powerful words; for what you put after them shapes your reality.

*Medical Disclaimer*

Please note that the material in this guide is provided by way of information. It is not a substitute, nor does it replace, medical or other professional advice, or treatment of health conditions.

## *Cholesterol 101*

There's a lot of material out there about "good" and "bad" cholesterol. To figure out the difference, think of tow trucks in the blood stream. The truck that hauls cholesterol to your tissues and away from the liver is known as LDL or low density lipoprotein-- the "bad" cholesterol. HDL, or high density lipoprotein (the good guy), is the tow truck that can haul cholesterol out of your blood vessel and carry it back to the liver where it is broken down. The more dump trucks you have carrying cholesterol away from the blood vessel the better. This is why we shoot for low LDL and high HDL.

### *Why does cholesterol matter?*

High cholesterol is one of the major controllable risk factors for heart disease, heart attack and stroke. Heart disease is the #1 killer of men and women in the United States. Monitoring your cholesterol levels and taking proactive steps to lower any high numbers is one of the most critical things you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease.

### *How does cholesterol affect my body?*

Cholesterol is needed for the body to be able to function. Cholesterol is actually a component of our cell membranes and is important in the production of certain hormones. To start with, the vast majority of cholesterol that is found in our blood stream is actually produced by the body itself. Specifically, cholesterol is manufactured by the liver. We also get cholesterol from our diet; it comes from foods that are derived from animals. The amount of cholesterol that our body produces and the amount we absorb from our diet varies and is based on each person's genetics.

When there is too much cholesterol in your blood stream, it can build up against the inner walls of the arteries that lead to your heart and brain. Together with other substances, cholesterol can form a thick, hard deposit called plaque that can make your arteries less flexible, slowing down or eventually blocking the blood flow to your heart and causing chest pain or possibly a heart attack.

High cholesterol has no symptoms, but your genetic makeup — reflected in a family history of high cholesterol — might make you more prone to high cholesterol, even if you eat right and exercise.

That's why it's so important to have a baseline cholesterol test at age 20 and have follow-up test at least once every five years. Finding the problem early allows you to take action before it's too late. Your doctor may recommend more frequent cholesterol tests if your total cholesterol level or LDL cholesterol level is high, or if you have a family history of heart disease or high cholesterol.

## *What do my cholesterol numbers mean?*

Depending on if you had a fasting lipoprotein profile, you may see these numbers in your results:

- **Total cholesterol:** Aim for a measurement of 199 and below mg/dL.
- **Low-density lipoprotein (LDL, or “bad” cholesterol):** The primary source of cholesterol buildup and blockage. This number depends on how many coronary heart disease risk factors you have, but the optimum is 99 and below mg/dL. (The higher your LDL level, the greater risk you have for heart disease.)
- **High-density lipoprotein (HDL, or “good” cholesterol):** The normal range is 40-59 mg/dL, with anything 60 and above mg/dL being very good. The higher your HDL, the lower your risk for heart disease.

## *What about triglycerides?*

Triglycerides are the main form of fat in the body. They are used for energy and unused triglycerides are transferred to fat cells for storage. A high triglyceride level can increase your risk of heart disease. The normal range for this is 149 and below mg/dL.

Triglycerides are important in relation to LDL. When you have high triglyceride numbers, they affect the size of your LDL cholesterol. Essentially, high numbers of triglycerides make your LDL smaller. When your LDL becomes smaller, it takes less effort for it to “squeeze” into your blood vessel, and in turn will make it easier for your LDL to form plaque in your blood vessel. Lower numbers of triglycerides and lower LDL numbers minimize the risk of heart disease.

## *What affects my cholesterol levels?*

Your cholesterol levels are determined by a variety of factors, some of which you can control:

- Diet — Saturated fat and cholesterol in food may increase your cholesterol level.
- Weight — Being overweight tends to increase your cholesterol level.
- Physical activity — Being inactive is a risk factor for heart disease.
- Age and gender — Your cholesterol levels can rise as you get older.
- Hereditary factors — High cholesterol levels can run in families.

## How can I treat high cholesterol?

The good news is that you can lower your cholesterol and reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. If you have high cholesterol, always discuss treatment options with your physician first to determine the best course of action. Here are a few ways you can lower your cholesterol level:

- Exercise: Physical activity is one of the best and easiest ways to raise your good cholesterol.
- Get rid of excess weight: If you're overweight or obese, slimming down can help significantly lower your cholesterol levels.
- A low-fat diet: Experts estimate that a low-fat diet can reduce bad cholesterol by up to 20% in some people.
- Dietary fiber: Eating fiber-rich foods can lower your cholesterol by about 5%.
- Eat good fats: Sources of monounsaturated fats like peanut butter, olive oil and avocado can help lower LDL and triglycerides while raising HDL levels.
- Stop smoking: This is crucial for all aspects of your health, not just cholesterol.
- Get enough sleep: Sleep deprivation can hike up your LDL cholesterol levels, so aim for 8-10 hours a night.
- Statins: These prescription drugs can lower bad LDL cholesterol by more than 50%.
- Niacin: This powerful B vitamin lowers LDL cholesterol and triglycerides while raising HDL levels.

## What else do I need to know about cholesterol?

Having high blood cholesterol puts you at risk of heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States. In fact, people with high cholesterol have double the risk of heart disease when compared with people with lower levels.

The most important thing you can do is be aware of your cholesterol levels. Talk with your physician and attend health screenings when they're offered. Over 71 million American adults have high LDL ("bad") cholesterol, and only 1 in 3 of those adults has the condition under control. Speak with your doctor, follow a healthy diet and activity regimen, and do everything you can to lower your cholesterol levels. Doing so will reduce your risk of having a heart attack, needing heart bypass surgery and dying of heart disease.

## Questions about your cholesterol numbers?

Email us at [news@totalwellnesshealth.com](mailto:news@totalwellnesshealth.com)!

### Heart Disease Risk Factors

You can control some risk factors, but not others. Risk factors you can control include:

- High blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes and prediabetes
- Overweight and obesity
- Smoking
- Lack of physical activity
- Unhealthy diet
- Stress

The risk factors you can't control are age, gender, and family history of CHD.