

# High Cholesterol (Lipid Disorders)



## What Are Lipids or Cholesterol?

Lipids, or cholesterol, are fatty substances in the blood. When cholesterol is too high, it can build up and clog blood vessels in your heart. This can cause heart attack, stroke, and other blood vessel diseases. There are several types of cholesterol that affect health:

- **LDL cholesterol** is the bad cholesterol. When there is too much LDL in the blood it can build up in the walls of arteries. This can lead to heart attack or stroke. Some oils, fatty meat, butter, fast food and foods high in fat and sugar can increase your LDL cholesterol.
- **HDL cholesterol** is the good cholesterol. Having high levels of HDL can help protect against heart attack. Eating more healthy foods such as oatmeal, nuts, fruits and vegetables can help to increase HDL cholesterol.
- **Total cholesterol** is all cholesterol combined.
- **Triglycerides** are a form of fat in the body. People with high triglycerides often have high total cholesterol.



## What Are the Warning Signs of High Cholesterol?

For most people, there are no symptoms of high cholesterol. The only way to tell for sure is to get your cholesterol levels checked by a doctor. Most people should have their cholesterol tested every 5 years. Your doctor may suggest you get your cholesterol checked more often if you:

- Have a family history of high cholesterol or heart disease
- Are a smoker
- Have diabetes
- Have high blood pressure
- Have a poor diet
- Do not exercise often



## How Is High Cholesterol Diagnosed?

High cholesterol is diagnosed through a blood test. The results of the test will usually tell you the levels of total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, HDL cholesterol, and triglycerides in your blood. You may have to stop eating food and drinking anything other than water for a few hours before the blood test. Talk to your doctor about how you should prepare for the blood test.



## How Is High Cholesterol Treated?

You can improve your cholesterol levels through healthy eating, exercising, quitting smoking, and cutting down on alcohol. Healthy eating includes:

- Eating less sugar
- Eating lean cuts of meat
- Increasing fruits and vegetables
- Choosing healthier fats such as those found in olive, peanut and canola oils
- Using whole grains
- Reducing fried foods, cookies, crackers and snack cakes

For people who can't improve their cholesterol with lifestyle changes alone, medicines may be needed. Treatment may be one medicine or a combination of medicines, in addition to lifestyle changes. There are different types of medicines for high cholesterol. Talk to your doctor about which medicine will be best for you.

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## Questions for My Doctor

- How often should I have my cholesterol levels checked?
- What foods should I eat? What foods should I avoid?
- How can I tell which foods have good cholesterol?
- Can I still eat some of my favorite foods?
- What are the possible side effects of cholesterol-lowering medicine?
- Are there any different medicines with fewer side effects?
- What does smoking have to do with cholesterol?



## Bottom Line

- Lipids, or cholesterol, are fatty substances in the blood. When cholesterol is too high, it can build up and clog blood vessels in your heart. This can cause heart attack, stroke, and other blood vessel diseases.
- Most people don't have any symptoms of high cholesterol.
- A blood test is the only way to know if you have high cholesterol. You may have to stop eating food and drinking anything other than water for several hours before the blood test.
- Lifestyle changes such as healthy diet, exercise, and quitting smoking can all help to lower cholesterol. Some people may need cholesterol-lowering medicine in addition to lifestyle changes.

## For More Information

- **ACP:** [www.acponline.org/cgi-bin/cpph.cgi?CPP3004\\_Make\\_It\\_Happen\\_2014.pdf](http://www.acponline.org/cgi-bin/cpph.cgi?CPP3004_Make_It_Happen_2014.pdf) and [www.acponline.org/cgi-bin/cpph.cgi?CPP3009\\_Caring\\_For\\_Your\\_Heart\\_2014\\_update.pdf](http://www.acponline.org/cgi-bin/cpph.cgi?CPP3009_Caring_For_Your_Heart_2014_update.pdf)
- **Medline Plus:** [www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/cholesterol.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/cholesterol.html)
- **American Heart Association:** [www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/Cholesterol/Cholesterol\\_UCM\\_001089\\_SubHomePage.jsp](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/Cholesterol/Cholesterol_UCM_001089_SubHomePage.jsp)

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