



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY & CORRECTIONAL SERVICES
EDUCATION HANDOUT – CHOLESTEROL
MAKING SENSE OF CHOLESTEROL

Cholesterol is a waxy substance your body uses to protect nerves, make cell tissues and produce certain hormones. All the cholesterol your body needs is made by your liver. Cholesterol in the food you eat (such as eggs, meats and dairy products) is extra, and too much cholesterol can have negative impacts on your health.



While some cholesterol is needed for good health, too much cholesterol in your blood can raise your risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

The extra cholesterol in your blood may be stored in your arteries (blood vessels that carry blood from your heart to the rest of your body). Buildup of cholesterol (called plaque) in your arteries will cause your arteries to narrow and harden (called atherosclerosis). Large deposits of cholesterol can completely block an artery.

If an artery that supplies blood to make muscles in your heart becomes blocked, a heart attack can occur. If an artery that supplies blood to your brain becomes blocked, a stroke can occur.

When should I start having my cholesterol levels checked?

Men 35 years of age or older and women 45 years of age and older should have their cholesterol checked yearly. Depending on what your cholesterol level is and what risk factors for heart disease you have, you may need to have it checked more often.

Risk factors for heart disease:

- Having already had a heart attack
- Being a man 35 years of age or older
- Being a woman 45 years of age or older
- Being a woman who is going through menopause or has complete menopause
- Having an immediate family member (parent or sibling) who had heart disease
- Smoking cigarettes
- Having high blood pressure or diabetes
- Being overweight or obese
- Being inactive

What are the different types of cholesterol?

Cholesterol travels through the blood in different types of packages, called lipoproteins.

- Low-density lipoproteins (LDL) deliver cholesterol to the body. Too much LDL cholesterol is bad for the body. If your total cholesterol level is high because of high LDL level, you may be at higher risk of heart disease or stroke.



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- High-density lipoproteins (HDL) remove cholesterol from the bloodstream. High levels of HDL are good. If your total level is high because of a high HDL level, you may be a lower risk.

Total cholesterol level:

- Less than 200 is best
- 200 to 239 is borderline high
- 240 or more means a higher risk of heart disease

LDL cholesterol level:

- Below 100 is optimal for people who have a higher risk of heart disease
- 100 to 129 is near optimal
- 130 to 159 is borderline high
- 160 or more means a higher risk for heart disease

HDL cholesterol level

- Less than 40 means a higher risk for heart disease
- 60 or higher greatly lowers risk of heart disease

What can I do to improve my cholesterol level?

- Stop smoking, if you smoke
- Exercise regularly
- Lose 5 to 10 pounds, it can help if you are overweight
- Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fish
- Avoid saturated and trans fats (mostly found in fast foods, snack foods, fried foods, and baked goods)
- If health eating and exercising don't work after 6 months to 1 year, your doctor may suggest medication to lower your cholesterol level.
- Limit consumption of specific foods that are high in cholesterol.

References

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, US Department of Agriculture. (2020) (2020-2025) *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Center for Nutrition and Policy Promotion.