



## What's high cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a type of fat called a lipid. Your body needs some cholesterol. But if you have too much, it starts to build up in your arteries. Arteries are the blood vessels that carry blood away from the heart.

To understand what happens, think about how a clog forms in the pipe under a kitchen sink. Like the buildup of grease in the pipe, the buildup of cholesterol narrows your arteries and makes it harder for blood to flow through them. This can lead to serious problems, including heart attack and stroke.

To find out how you're doing, compare your total cholesterol number to the following:

- **The best number** is less than 200.
- **A borderline-high number** is 200 to 239. Even borderline-high cholesterol makes you more likely to have a heart attack.
- **A high number** is 240 or above.

### What are the different kinds of cholesterol?

- **Low-density lipoproteins (LDL)** are the "bad" cholesterol and can clog your arteries. LDL should be less than 100. LDL increases your risk of heart problems, so the lower your LDL, the better. A level of 160 or above is high.
- **High-density lipoproteins (HDL)** are the "good" cholesterol. They help clear the bad cholesterol from your blood so it doesn't clog your arteries. A high level of HDL can protect you from a heart attack. HDL should be more than 40. HDL over 60 helps protect you against a heart attack. HDL below 40 increases your risk of heart problems. The higher your HDL, the better. A high HDL number can help offset a high LDL number.
- **Triglycerides** are another type of fat in the blood that can affect your health. If you have high triglycerides and high LDL, your chances of having a heart attack are higher. Triglycerides should be less than 150. A level above 150 may increase your risk for heart problems.

### How is it treated?

The two main treatments are lifestyle changes and medicines.

- **Lose weight**, if you need to. Losing just five to 10 pounds can lower your cholesterol and triglycerides. Losing weight can also help lower your blood pressure.
- **Be more active.** Exercise can raise your "good" HDL and may help you control your weight.
- **Quit smoking**, if you smoke. Quitting can help raise your HDL and improve your heart health.

Sometimes lifestyle changes are enough on their own. But if you try them for a few months and they don't lower your cholesterol enough, your doctor may prescribe a cholesterol-lowering medicine called a statin. You also may need medicines to lower triglycerides or raise HDL.

You will need to have your cholesterol checked regularly. Your results can help your doctor know if lifestyle changes have helped or if you need more or different medicines.



Sources:  
WebMD.com, *Cholesterol Management Health Center* (July, 2010); webmd.com

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