



Healthy Habits Can Lower Your Cholesterol

Heart-healthy eating, exercise and other lifestyle changes may reduce your need for medications and lower your risks for heart disease and stroke

When it comes to total cholesterol, a high score doesn't mean you're a winner. In fact, **lowering your total cholesterol score ("level") reduces your risks for blocked arteries, heart disease, heart attack and stroke.** Teaming healthy lifestyle habits with prescribed cholesterol medication can more effectively control your cholesterol—and might enable your doctor to decrease your medication dose.

Many factors can lower your levels of total cholesterol, low-density lipoprotein (LDL, sometimes called "bad" cholesterol) or triglycerides:

- **Diet.** Cholesterol is found only in animal-based foods, so fill your plate with more plant-based foods. A heart-healthy diet includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, nuts and whole grains—and limits foods like red meat, butter, whole milk, full-fat cheese or egg yolks.
- **Exercise.** Adding a little pep into your day improves cholesterol levels. You don't have to be a pro athlete to benefit—even a daily walk around your neighborhood can lower your total cholesterol level. Aim for at least 30 minutes per day. If necessary, break it into three 10-minute sessions to fit your schedule.
- **Weight loss.** Too much weight forces the heart to work harder, so losing weight is an important step toward preventing heart disease and stroke. Losing even 5 to 10 pounds can lower cholesterol levels.
- **Smoking cessation.** If you smoke, lowering your cholesterol is just one good reason to stop. Smoking raises the body's triglyceride level, which is the most common type of fat in the body. Stopping smoking can boost HDL (high-density lipoprotein—the "good" cholesterol) and also reduces other risk factors for heart disease and stroke.
- **Medication.** Be sure to take medications prescribed by your doctor and get recommended blood tests. You may even be able to reduce your medication dose by eating healthier and exercising more. *Always speak with your doctor before changing your medication regimen.*

Tools to Help You

HealthFlex offers wellness resources to help you manage your cholesterol and improve your overall well-being—at no extra cost to you.

- **Virgin HealthMiles**—Earn rewards as you boost your physical activity. Walking is an easy way for most people to become more active. If you're not yet enrolled in the HealthMiles program, go to www.gbophb.org, log in to **HealthFlex/WebMD** and click on "Join Virgin HealthMiles."
- **Confidential Health Coaching**—Talk with a professional health coach for helpful support as you focus on wellness goals, such as trimming cholesterol from your meals. Health coaching is confidential and is provided by phone at your convenience. Start by taking the **HealthQuotient** on the HealthFlex/WebMD website, or call **1-866-302-5742** to learn more about the health coaching program.
- **Web-based health information**—Browse through the Cholesterol Health Management Center on the HealthFlex/WebMD website for access to a free newsletter, wellness information and tools to help you manage cholesterol levels. Go to www.gbophb.org, log in to **HealthFlex/WebMD** and click on "Health Management Centers."

Talk with your doctor about strategies for controlling your cholesterol, lowering your medication dose and improving your health.

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Making Sense of the Numbers

Cholesterol is measured in “mg/dL” (milligrams per deciliter). When it comes to cholesterol, health professionals focus on four key numbers*:

- **Total cholesterol**—Less than 200 mg/dL is optimal. “Total cholesterol” measures high-density lipoproteins, low-density lipoproteins and triglycerides.
- **Low-density lipoprotein (LDL, sometimes called “bad” cholesterol)**—Less than 100 mg/dL may lower your risks for heart attack and stroke.
- **High-density lipoprotein (HDL, sometimes called “good” cholesterol)**—At least 50 mg/dL for women and at least 60 mg/dL for men helps protect against heart disease. With HDL, higher is better.
- **Triglycerides (the most common type of fat in the body)**—An average triglyceride level of less than 150 mg/dL is recommended. Being overweight or inactive, smoking, eating a high-carbohydrate diet or drinking excess alcohol can raise triglycerides.

For some people, their genetic profile contributes to higher-than-ideal cholesterol levels. While you can’t change your genetics, you *can* positively impact your cholesterol with the help of a heart-healthy diet, exercise, weight control, medications and other factors.

* Source: American Heart Association

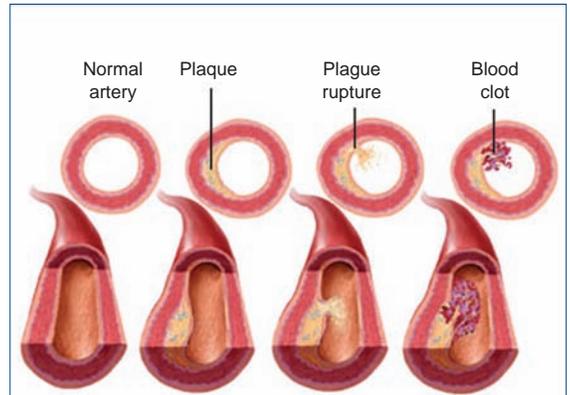


Photo courtesy of American Heart Association

Understanding Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a fat substance that exists in all cells of the body. It is transported through the blood, but doesn’t dissolve in the blood.

Cholesterol in controlled amounts actually helps the body. But *too much cholesterol* accumulates as plaque in arteries and other blood vessels. As plaque builds up, blood vessels narrow and restrict blood flow throughout the body. A blocked blood vessel can cause a heart attack or stroke.

Learn More About Cholesterol and Heart Disease

You can find credible information online:

- **HealthFlex/WebMD**—Go to www.gbophb.org, click on “HealthFlex/WebMD” and enter your username and password. Under “Get Started,” choose “Health Management Centers” and then “Cholesterol.”
- **American Heart Association**—Go to www.heart.org. Browse topics under “Conditions.”

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