

Cholesterol: What Should Your Level Be?

Do you know what your cholesterol level is? If not, do yourself a favor – find out what it is, and ask your doctor if it's a problem.

Your cholesterol level affects your risk of developing heart disease and of having a heart attack or a stroke. That's because cholesterol, which is found in the blood, can build up in the walls of your arteries. As cholesterol builds up, it can narrow and harden the arteries, making it more difficult for blood to travel through them.

A heart attack happens when the arteries in the heart get so clogged with cholesterol that blood cannot pass through, or when the cholesterol deposits inside them burst. A stroke happens when the blood vessels feeding the brain get clogged.

As a result, the higher your cholesterol, the higher the risk of a heart attack, stroke, and other related complications. Luckily, there's lots you can do to lower your cholesterol – and therefore your risk.

What To Do if Your Cholesterol is High

Everyone age 20 and older should have a cholesterol test at least once every 5 years. People with diabetes or coronary artery disease should have a test at least once a year. If you haven't had one of these tests recently enough, ask your doctor about it.

If your cholesterol level turns out to be high, your doctor may tell you that you need to lower it. Anyone who needs to lower their cholesterol should be physically active and manage their weight. Regular physical activity can help lower cholesterol. If you are overweight, losing weight can also help lower it.

If you have high cholesterol, your diet is also very important. That's because certain kinds of foods can increase your cholesterol levels.

People hoping to lower their cholesterol level should avoid or cut down on high-fat foods such as fatty meats, fried foods, and donuts. They should instead eat lean meats, low-fat dairy products, and foods high in fiber. Good sources of fiber include vegetables, fruits, beans, and oat bran, as well as whole-grain cereals, breads, and pastas.

Some people can't reach their target cholesterol levels with diet and exercise alone. They may receive medications to further reduce cholesterol levels. Still, even if you are taking cholesterol-lowering medication, that does not make it "ok" to eat unhealthy foods.

A LifeSteps Health Coach Can Help

If you have questions about your cholesterol levels or heart disease risk, call a Health Coach. Health Coaches are specially trained healthcare professionals, such as nurses, dietitians, and respiratory therapists, available by phone, anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at no charge to you.

Health Coaches can support you in finding ways to lower your cholesterol. When appropriate, a Health Coach can also mail additional information, including videotapes, at no charge. To talk to a Health Coach, call (phone number). You can also get information online at LifeSteps Online.

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If you can't lower your cholesterol enough through diet and exercise, your doctor may also prescribe medications to further reduce cholesterol levels.

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