

A photograph of a woman with short blonde hair and a young child swinging happily on a swing set. The woman is in the background, smiling broadly, and the child is in the foreground, also smiling. The scene is outdoors with green foliage in the background.

Getting a Handle on **CHOLESTEROL**

 Marshfield Clinic
 MINISTRY HEALTH CARE



Two Leaders, One Leading Heart Care Team

Getting a handle on Cholesterol

By now, most of us have heard that high cholesterol is bad for you. But what does high cholesterol really mean? Why does high cholesterol matter? Read on to learn the basics about cholesterol and why lowering it can also lower your risk for heart disease.

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a fat-like, waxy substance in the blood which comes, in part, from the foods we eat. While some cholesterol in the bloodstream is important, too much is unhealthy and increases your likelihood of having a heart attack or stroke. The American Heart Association recommends limiting your total cholesterol intake to no more than 300 milligrams per day – less than 200 milligrams if you have cardiovascular disease.

Why is it important to understand cholesterol?

High cholesterol is a major cause of heart disease. Heart disease is the number one killer of American men and women. The American Heart Association estimates that nearly half of all Americans have high cholesterol. The higher your cholesterol levels, the greater your risk for heart disease.

What's the difference between good cholesterol and bad cholesterol?

- **Low-density lipoprotein (LDL)** cholesterol is described as the “bad cholesterol” (think L=Lousy) because it can build up in your arteries and lead to blockage.
- **High-density lipoprotein (HDL)** cholesterol is called the “good cholesterol” (think H=Healthy) because it actually carries cholesterol away from your arteries, reducing your risk of developing heart disease.

What should my cholesterol numbers be?

Your LDL goal depends on how many risk factors you have. Generally, it should be 130 mg/dL or less. If you have heart disease OR diabetes your goal should be less than 100 mg/dL. Your goal should be less than 70 mg/dL if you have BOTH conditions.

What are triglycerides?

Triglycerides are another type of fat found in the blood and in food. Most of the fat you eat is in the form of triglycerides. The body makes triglycerides from different calorie sources. Triglycerides are the body's transport system



for unused calories. Extra calories are converted to triglycerides and stored in fatty tissue. High triglyceride level is a risk factor for heart disease. An optimal blood triglyceride level is less than 150 mg/dL.

Recent research indicates that triglyceride levels that are borderline high (150–199 mg/dL) or high (200–499 mg/dL) may increase your risk for heart disease. (Levels of 500 mg/dL or more need to be lowered with medication to prevent the pancreas from becoming inflamed.)

How can I improve my cholesterol numbers?

There are steps that you can take to keep your cholesterol levels in check and lower your risk for heart disease.

■ **Choose Healthier Foods**

AVOID SATURATED FATS AND TRANS FATS

Limiting saturated fats and trans fats can reduce LDL (bad) cholesterol. Avoid animal fat products (such as butter, meat, poultry, whole milk and cheese), hydrogenated fats (those that are solid at room temperature, like shortening), palm oil, coconut oil and cocoa butter. Fried foods are a major source of trans fats and should also be avoided.



USE MONOUNSATURATED AND POLYUNSATURATED FATS

Monounsaturated fat is found in oils, such as olive and canola. Polyunsaturated fat is found in safflower, sunflower, soybean, corn, sesame and many other oils made from nuts and seeds. While these are better types of fat, all fats are high in calories so it is best to limit total fat intake.

USE LOW-FAT SUBSTITUTIONS

Low-fat versions of many foods are available.

It is also possible to use alternate ingredients. Try using:

- Three ripe, very well-mashed bananas instead of a half cup of butter or oil in muffins or bread
- Applesauce rather than oil or other fats in your favorite cake recipe
- Mustard instead of mayonnaise on sandwiches
- Egg whites or egg substitute instead of whole eggs in baking or cooking
- Plain yogurt instead of sour cream or mayonnaise

EAT MORE FRUITS, VEGETABLES AND WHOLE GRAIN FOODS

These foods are high in fiber, which helps to reduce blood cholesterol.

■ **If You Smoke, Quit**

Smoking reduces HDL (good) cholesterol by 10-20%; quitting may increase good cholesterol.



■ **Lose Weight**

Over 65% of all adult Americans are overweight, increasing their chances of having high LDL (bad) cholesterol and low HDL (good) cholesterol. Decreases in body weight and body fat are associated with favorable changes in cardiovascular risk factors, including increased HDL (good) cholesterol and decreased total cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol and triglyceride levels.



■ **Exercise**

Another very important way of decreasing cholesterol levels is engaging in exercise. It has been shown that regular exercise definitely decreases cholesterol levels and also helps to maintain proper weight. Ask your health care provider about the kinds of exercise that could be useful for your particular situation.

Know your numbers... and your risks

If you don't know your cholesterol levels, make an appointment with your doctor for some simple tests, because you can have high cholesterol and not realize it. The general recommendation is to have your cholesterol levels tested once every five years after age 34 for men and age 44 for women. Your doctor may recommend a different schedule based on your individual circumstances.

If your numbers are too high, your doctor may recommend changes to your diet or exercise levels. When that is not enough, prescription medications may be needed. Your health care provider will also determine if a referral to a cardiologist, a specialist in heart care, is necessary.

High cholesterol is just one of a cluster of risk factors for heart disease. Talk to your health care provider about your heart health – and take an active role in managing your health.

CERTAINTY

*When you're facing heart disease,
choose the most comprehensive
care in the region.*

**The Marshfield Clinic and Ministry Health Care
heart care team offers the certainty of...**

...more options and tools available for diagnosing,
combating and treating heart disease.

...more heart specialists performing **more heart
procedures**, and handling **more complex cases**
than any other provider in the area.

...more convenient locations, including 15 sites
offering cardiac specialty care and two advanced treatment
and surgical centers.

...more research, providing many patients access to
clinical trials through which they can receive promising
investigational medicines and treatment options.

To find a primary care provider in your area,
please visit us online at www.oneheartcareteam.org

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 - Wausau
 - Weston
 - Wittenberg
 - Stanley
 - Marshfield
 - Stevens Point/Plover
 - Wisconsin Rapids

Marshfield Clinic cardiologists are available for appointments and consultations at 15 locations.



Marshfield Clinic



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For a second opinion, or for more information on our heart care team, call us at **1-800-888-4755**