



## What Do My Cholesterol Levels Mean?

High cholesterol can increase your risk of heart attack and stroke. That's why it's important to have your cholesterol checked regularly. Your doctor will do a blood test called a fasting "lipoprotein profile" to measure your cholesterol levels. It assesses several types of fat in the blood. It is measured in milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL). The test gives you four results: total cholesterol, LDL (bad) and HDL (good) cholesterol, and triglycerides (blood fats).



### What should my total cholesterol level be?

In the past, treatment guidelines directed healthcare providers to focus on treating their patients to target goal levels for total cholesterol, LDL, HDL and triglycerides. However, current prevention guidelines recommend an approach that goes beyond cholesterol levels alone and considers overall risk assessment and reduction.

It's still important to know your numbers, but work with your healthcare provider to treat your risk.

### What numbers do I need to know?

You should be aware of five key numbers: total cholesterol, HDL (good) cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar and body mass index (BMI).

These numbers are important because they will allow you and your healthcare provider to determine your risk for developing cardiovascular disease caused by atherosclerosis. This includes conditions such as angina (chest pain), heart attack, stroke (caused by blood clots) and peripheral artery disease (PAD).

Ideal numbers for most adults are:

Category	Ideal Numbers
Total Cholesterol	Get your cholesterol checked and talk to your doctor about your numbers and how they impact your overall risk.
HDL Cholesterol	
Blood Pressure	Less than 120/80 mm Hg
Fasting Blood Sugar	Less than 100 mg/dL
Body Mass Index (BMI)	Less than 25 kg/m <sup>2</sup>

### What is HDL cholesterol?

HDL cholesterol is called "good" cholesterol. Having a high level of HDL can lower your risk of heart attack and stroke.

HDL takes cholesterol away from your arteries and back to the liver. There, it's processed so that excess can be removed from your body. HDL may also remove cholesterol from plaque in the arteries.

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**What is LDL cholesterol?**

LDL cholesterol is known as “bad” cholesterol. The body’s tissues use some of this cholesterol to build cells. But when you have too much of it, LDL can build up inside your arteries.

Together with other substances, it can form plaque (a thick, hard, fatty deposit). Plaque narrows the arteries and reduces blood flow. This is called atherosclerosis.

**What are triglycerides?**

Triglycerides are the most common type of fat in your body. They’re also a major energy source. They come from food, and your body also makes them.

As people get older, gain excess weight (or both), their triglyceride and cholesterol levels tend to rise.



**Know Your Numbers**

Use the chart below to keep track of your numbers each time you have a test. Make sure you discuss these numbers with your doctor.

	1st Visit	2nd Visit	3rd Visit	4th Visit
<b>Total Blood Cholesterol</b>				
<b>HDL Cholesterol</b>				
<b>Blood Pressure</b>				
<b>Fasting Blood Sugar</b>				
<b>Body Mass Index (BMI)</b>				

**HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?**

- 1 Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up to get **Heart Insight**, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at **heartinsight.org**.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at **heart.org/supportnetwork**.

**Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?**

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

**How often should I have my cholesterol checked?**

**How can I reduce my cholesterol?**

**My Questions:**

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.

