

## Lifesaving Tips to ... Control Your Cholesterol

**C**holesterol is a waxy, fatlike substance found in the walls of cells in all parts of the body. Your body needs cholesterol to perform important jobs, such as making hormones and building cells. However, having high levels of a certain type of cholesterol can be harmful.

### What Is the Link Between Cholesterol and Peripheral Artery Disease?

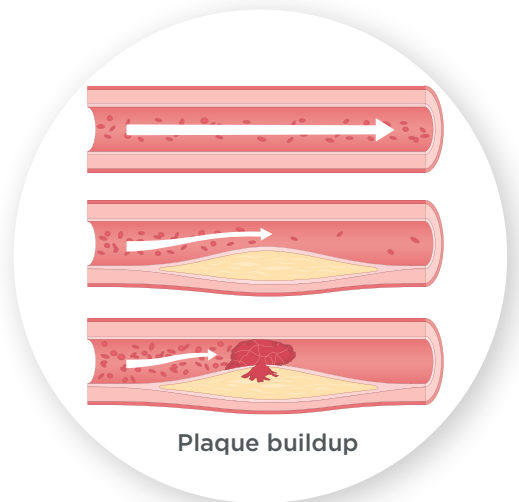
When there is too much unhealthy cholesterol in your blood, the walls of your blood vessels can become narrowed or clogged with fatty deposits called **plaque**. Over time, the plaque builds up and causes hardening of the arteries (or **atherosclerosis**).

In atherosclerosis, arteries become narrowed and blood flow is slowed down or blocked. When arteries harden in one part of the body, it is likely they have hardened in other parts.

**Peripheral artery disease (PAD)** occurs when there is a buildup of plaque inside the arteries that carry blood to your legs and feet. People with PAD are likely to have hardened and narrowed arteries in the heart and brain, putting them at much higher risk for a heart attack or a stroke. The good news is that studies show that keeping blood cholesterol levels under control can help people with PAD lower their chances of heart attack, stroke, and poor quality of life.

### How Do I Know if My Cholesterol Level Is High?

The only way to know your cholesterol numbers is to have a blood test. Your cholesterol levels should be checked at least once a year. If you take medicines to control cholesterol, or have high



cholesterol, ask your health care team how often your cholesterol should be checked.

### What Does a Cholesterol Test Measure?

When you have a lipoprotein panel (the test that tells you your cholesterol levels), it will measure:

- **Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol**—known as the “bad,” or

For more information, review these related flyers:

- Stroke
- What is Peripheral Artery Disease?

unhealthy, cholesterol because it sticks to blood vessel walls and causes a buildup of plaque. High LDL cholesterol increases the risk for PAD, heart attack, and stroke.

- **High-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol**—called the “good,” or “healthy,” cholesterol. It helps prevent cholesterol from building up inside
- **Triglycerides**—not a type of cholesterol but a type of fat found in your blood. A high triglyceride level combined with high LDL cholesterol or low HDL

your blood vessels and keeps them from getting blocked. The higher your HDL cholesterol, the better. Low HDL cholesterol increases the risk for heart attack, stroke, and PAD.

cholesterol is linked with fatty buildups within the artery walls, which increases the risk of heart attack and stroke. Foods high in triglycerides include artificially sweetened drinks (sodas, fruit drinks), foods with added sugars, starchy foods (sugary cereals, pastries), and high-calorie foods (fast food).

## How Can I Manage My Cholesterol?

Research studies show that both lifestyle changes and medicines can help to reduce LDL cholesterol levels. Since each person is different, it is important to work with your health care team to find the treatment plan that is right for you. Here are some tips to help you lower your cholesterol and adopt a heart-healthy lifestyle.

**Cut back on foods that raise LDL cholesterol and eat more foods that help boost HDL cholesterol.** The foods you eat can help increase the wrong type or the right type of cholesterol in your blood. By cutting down on your intake of foods high in saturated fat, you also will help reduce your intake of LDL cholesterol.

- Foods that increase LDL (bad) cholesterol: Full-fat dairy products (cheese, milk, yogurt) and deep-fried foods
- Foods that increase HDL (good) cholesterol: Olive oil, beans, whole grains, fatty fish

Other ways to raise HDL cholesterol levels include regular physical activity, losing excess weight, and quitting smoking.



**Eat more fiber.** High-fiber foods can help lower your cholesterol and are good for your digestive tract. They are a good food choice since they help you feel full on fewer calories and can assist with weight loss. Some suggestions:

- Choose breakfast cereals such as oatmeal and oat bran.
- Add fruits such as bananas, berries, and sliced peaches or apples to your cereal and eat them as snacks.
- Add lentils, peas, and beans (black, kidney, white, pinto, or other types) to salads or eat them as a main dish a few times each week.



**Get more physical activity.** Ask your health care team for help starting a new exercise or walking routine. It is OK to take it slow. It may take a few weeks to be able to exercise for at least 30 minutes a day. If you are just starting out, begin with five minutes a day and add more time every few days (at least two to five minutes) to challenge yourself.



**Manage your weight.** Losing excess weight will help lower LDL cholesterol. Losing excess weight is manageable with an exercise routine and an eating plan that works for you. You'll also need support from family, friends, loved ones, and your health care team. Planning and asking for support increase your chances for making significant changes in your lifestyle. Small daily changes can lead to great results that can last a lifetime.



**Quit smoking.** Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do to lower your chances of a heart attack or stroke. Ask your health care team about how they can help you quit.



**Take medicines as prescribed.** There are several types of medicines available to control LDL cholesterol. Your health care team will prescribe the right medicine, or maybe even more than one, that works for you. If you need medicine to lower your cholesterol, make sure to talk with your provider about:

- The name of your medication
- How much you are expected to take
- Possible side effects

*It is important to talk with your health care provider before you stop medications on your own. Talk with your health care team about other options.*

# What Should My Cholesterol Goal Be?

People with PAD need to keep track of their LDL and HDL cholesterol. Ask your health care provider what your LDL and HDL levels should be and if they can help you make a plan to keep your cholesterol at the right levels. Remember: Having high LDL and low HDL cholesterol levels increases your risk for developing severe or serious disease.

You can track these numbers here:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

My current LDL cholesterol: \_\_\_\_\_

My current HDL cholesterol: \_\_\_\_\_

My target LDL should be: \_\_\_\_\_

My target HDL should be: \_\_\_\_\_

My health care provider says that my risk is:

- High
- Low
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## ACTION PLAN FOR HEART-HEALTHY EATING

Pick one to start, or write your own.

- I will replace ground beef in some of my recipes with a lean meat, such as ground chicken or ground turkey.
- Every day I will choose to include a serving of heart-healthy fats, found in foods such as avocados, almonds, salmon, and olive oil.
- I will eat fried foods 50% less often.
- Once a week, I will try to eat a plant-based meal.

Fill in my own goals here:

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## My Plan to Lower LDL Cholesterol

The three reasons I want to lower my LDL cholesterol:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Three things I can do this week to lower my LDL cholesterol level:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

People who can help me lower my LDL cholesterol level (for example, your spouse, a friend, or your health care team):

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Questions for Your Doctor

It is important to work closely with your health care provider about your diagnosis and treatment. You can bring this form with you to help talk to your medical provider about any questions and concerns you may have.



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