

The Good, The Bad and The Ugly (Cholesterol, That is)



Cholesterol is a fatty substance naturally found in the body. Your body already produces all of the cholesterol it needs to survive on its own. However, the foods you eat can contribute to your blood cholesterol levels and cause a buildup in the artery walls. When cholesterol and other fatty deposits – like triglycerides – collect in an artery they can cause a clogged artery, which reduces blood flow and can lead to a heart attack or stroke.

A Tale of Two Cholesterols

Cholesterol has traditionally received a bad reputation, but there are actually two forms of cholesterol.



Low-Density Lipoprotein, commonly referred to as LDL, is the bad cholesterol that attaches to other fats and clogs the inner walls of your arteries. Excess LDL can lead to atherosclerosis, a hardening of the artery walls.



On the other hand, **HDL – High-Density Lipoprotein** – is actually a good form of cholesterol, as it aids in the process of removing LDL from your arteries, and reduces your risk of having a stroke or heart attack.

To be in the optimal range, aim for a level of LDL below 100 mg/dL, and a level of HDL above 60 mg/dL. High risk ranges include an LDL level at or above 160 mg/dL, and an HDL level at or below 40 mg/dL. Additionally, your total cholesterol should be below 200 mg/dL.

	Ideal	Borderline High	High
Total Cholesterol	<200 mg/dL	200-239 mg/dL	≥240 mg/dL
LDL Cholesterol	<100 mg/dL	100-159 mg/dL	≥160 mg/dL
	Ideal	Borderline Low	Low
HDL Cholesterol	>60 mg/dL	40-59 mg/dL	≤40 mg/dL

FAST FACTS

- **33.5%** of American adults have high LDL (bad) cholesterol
- Only **1 out of 3** Americans with high LDL cholesterol has the condition properly controlled
- People with high total cholesterol have **twice the risk** of heart disease as people with ideal levels
- **68%** of adults have had their blood cholesterol checked within the past five years.

Are you one of the 32% that doesn't know your numbers? If so, there is no better time to schedule a visit with your physician than now!



How Can I Improve My Cholesterol?

- Limit the amount of foods you eat that are high in saturated fat and cholesterol. This includes foods such as fatty meats, cheeses, egg yolks, whole milk, shellfish, and solid fats like butter.
- Eat foods high in dietary fiber, including rye and wheat bread, beans, and a variety of fruits and vegetables. Most adults should consume around 25 grams of fiber per day.
- Engage in moderate-intensity aerobic activity, such as brisk walking, at least 30 minutes per day, five days per week.
- Achieve or maintain a healthy weight.
- Ask your doctor about other ways to lower the bad cholesterol and triglyceride levels in your blood, including through use of medications.

Sources: American Heart Association (www.heart.org), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov)

