FDA Office of Women's Health

# Cholesterol

CHOLESTEROL

**Did you know...?**

- Women over age 20 should have their cholesterol checked by their doctor.
- Women over the age of 55 tend to have higher cholesterol levels than men.
- High cholesterol can increase your chance of having heart disease.

**What is Cholesterol?**

- Cholesterol is a fat-like material in your blood. Your body makes its own cholesterol. When you eat foods that have lots of fat or cholesterol, you can have too much cholesterol in your blood.
- Cholesterol can build up on the inside the blood vessels of your heart. If too much cholesterol builds up, then the blood cannot flow through to your heart. This can cause a heart attack.

**Good vs. Bad Cholesterol**

Not all cholesterol in your blood is bad for you. There are three kinds of blood cholesterol that you should know about: HDL (good cholesterol), LDL, (bad cholesterol) and triglycerides.

| Good Cholesterol | Bad Cholesterol |
|---|---|
| Good cholesterol is called HDL | Bad cholesterol is called LDL |
| Helps to keep the arteries from clogging up | Causes the build up in your arteries and cause blockages of your arteries |
| Protects against heart disease | Causes heart disease |
| Good level = 60mg/dL or more | Good level = under 100mg/dL |

Triglycerides are another form of fat in your blood. They can also raise your risk for heart disease. Levels that are borderline high (150-199 mg/dL) or high (200 mg/dL or more) may need treatment.

**What are the warning signs of high blood cholesterol?**

- Most people do not have any signs.
- Sometimes cholesterol can build up in the blood vessels of your heart and cause chest pains.

**How do you find out if you have high cholesterol?**

- Go to the doctor and ask for a cholesterol test. The test will let you know how much good and bad cholesterol you have.
- The doctor will tell you the number for your total cholesterol level.
- Your total cholesterol number should be under 200.

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# *Cholesterol (cont.)*

**What can you do?**

There are things that you can do to lower your cholesterol.

- Cut back on foods with lots of fat such as fatty meats, fried foods, whole milk, fatty cheeses, butter, margarine, oils, lard, and creams.
- Cut back on food with lots of cholesterol, such as egg yokes and whole eggs.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables.
- Cut back on fatty snacks and desserts, such as candy, cookies, doughnuts, muffins, pastries and pies.
- Exercise at least 30 minutes most days.
- If you are overweight, try to lose weight. Try to lose weight by cutting back on the amount that you eat. Even a small amount of weight loss can help lower your bad cholesterol, and you will also help your health in other ways.
- Ask your doctor if you need to take medicine to help lower your cholesterol.

**To Learn More...**

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
Health Information Center
Phone: 301-592-8573
Web: http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/infoctr/index.htm

The National Women's Health Information Center
Phone: 1-800-994-WOMAN (1-800-994-9662)
1-888-220-5446 for the hearing impaired
Web: http://www.4women.gov/faq/cholesterol.htm