

Frequently Asked Questions About High Cholesterol

General Information for Members About High Cholesterol and Ways to Help Prevent Heart Disease



What medicines are used to lower cholesterol?

There are many kinds of medications that a doctor may prescribe to lower cholesterol. Your doctor can help you decide if medicine is right for you and, if so, which medicine. “Statins” are prescribed most often. If you need to take medicine for high cholesterol, remember to take it as your doctor has directed, even if you are feeling well.

Many cholesterol drugs are available as generics. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about your medication options.

Examples of Medications Used to Treat High Cholesterol

Generic Name	Brand Name*	Generic Available?
lovastatin	Mevacor®	yes
pravastatin	Pravachol®	yes
simvastatin	Zocor®	yes
ezetimibe	Zetia®	no
ezetimibe + simvastatin	Vytorin®	no
rosuvastatin	Crestor®	no
atorvastatin	Lipitor®	no
fluvastatin	Lescol® Lescol XL®	no

*Third party brand names are the property of their respective owners.

For more drug education information, including drug interactions and side effects, visit www.bcbstil.com and log on to Blue Access® for Members.

How can I manage my risk for heart disease?

The AHA recommends the following strategies to help you manage your cholesterol levels and risk for heart disease.

- Have your cholesterol checked by your doctor at least once every five years after age 20.
- Talk with your doctor about your risk factors for heart disease.
- Talk to your doctor about what is a healthy weight for you. Try to reach and maintain that weight. You can also use the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s online Weight and Body Mass Calculator listed in the Internet Resources section at right to get an idea of a good weight for you.
- Read food labels and ask for nutrition information at restaurants. Try to avoid foods that contain saturated fats or trans fats such as fatty meats, butter or fried food.
- Limit your total fat intake to 25 to 35 percent of your total calories each day. Replace saturated fats with healthier, unsaturated fats, found in foods such as fish, nuts and avocados.
- If you smoke, talk with your doctor about ways to quit.
- Exercise for 30 minutes most days to help increase your “good” cholesterol. You can exercise for 30 minutes straight or split it into 10-minute sessions.
- Find an activity that you enjoy doing. You’ll be more likely to stick with it.

Internet Resources

You can find more information about managing your cholesterol levels at the following Web sites:

American Heart Association (AHA)

www.americanheart.org

National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI)

www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/index.htm#chol
www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/chol/wyntk.htm

NHLBI Risk Calculator

hin.nhlbi.nih.gov/atp/iii/calculator.asp

Weight and Body Mass Calculator

www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/calc-bmi.htm

Diet Tips from Harvard University

www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/fats.html



BlueCross BlueShield of Illinois

This brochure and the suggested resources provide general information to help you better understand high cholesterol. It is important to keep in contact with your doctor if you have high cholesterol. This information is not meant to replace anything your doctor has told you about your cholesterol levels. Instead, it is for educational purposes only.

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What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a type of fat made and used by the body. Fats help build cells and produce energy. If you have too much cholesterol in the blood, however, it is hard on your body, especially your heart.

There are good and bad kinds of cholesterol. The good kind, HDL, protects against heart disease. The bad kind, LDL, promotes heart disease.

As always, your doctor is your best resource when it comes to your health, but the information in this brochure may help you better understand cholesterol and how you can manage your risk for heart disease.

Why is it important to know my cholesterol levels?

High total cholesterol is a risk factor for heart disease. Having a high level increases your chances of having a stroke or heart attack. Heart disease is the number one cause of death in men and women in the United States, according to the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI).

You may not be able to tell that your cholesterol level is too high because high cholesterol itself does not cause symptoms. It is important to find out if you have high cholesterol so you and your doctor may begin taking steps that are right for you to lower your cholesterol, if necessary.

How do I know if I have high cholesterol?

The American Heart Association (AHA) as well as the NHLBI recommend that all adults over age 20 have their cholesterol checked at least once every five years. Your doctor will do a simple blood test to find out your cholesterol levels. Following your test, your doctor will usually give you four numbers: total cholesterol, HDL, LDL and triglycerides.

Total cholesterol is the “good” HDL and bad “LDL” cholesterol added together. This number should be below 200, and your doctor may want it to be even lower if you have other risks for heart disease. Smoking, high blood pressure and a family history of heart problems may increase your risk for heart disease. Age can also be a risk factor. For men, risk increases at age 45. For women, risk increases at age 55. Talk to your doctor about your individual risks.

Total Cholesterol Level*	Category
Less than 200 mg/dL	Desirable
200-239 mg/dL	Borderline high
240 mg/dL and above	High

*Cholesterol levels are measured in milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per deciliter (dL) of blood.

Sources: American Heart Association; National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute

HDL can lower risk of heart disease, so a high HDL number is better. An HDL level of 60 mg/dL or higher helps to decrease the risk for heart disease, according to the AHA. A level less than 40 mg/dL is too low and may increase the risk for heart problems.

Having a high LDL can increase risk of heart disease, so a lower number is better. The optimal level for LDL cholesterol is less than 100 mg/dL, says the AHA.

Triglycerides, another type of fat in the blood, are also measured when you have a cholesterol test. Too high a level of triglycerides can also be a sign of increased risk for heart disease. A normal level for triglycerides is usually below 150 mg/dL, recommends the AHA.

What affects cholesterol levels?

Many things can affect cholesterol levels. Some factors, such as diet and exercise, you can change. Others, such as family history of heart problems, you cannot change. If you have high cholesterol – whatever the cause – there are steps you can take that may help lower your cholesterol.

According to the NHLBI, things you can change include:

- **Diet.** Try to eat “good” monounsaturated fats, found in foods such as olive oil and fish, instead of “bad” saturated fats, which are in butter and fatty meat.
- **Weight.** Being overweight is a risk factor for heart disease. If you are overweight, losing weight can help lower LDL and raise HDL.
- **Exercise.** Exercise helps with weight control. Regular exercise – about 30 minutes a day – can lower “bad” cholesterol and raise “good” cholesterol. Lack of physical activity is a risk factor for heart disease.
- **Smoking.** If you smoke, take steps to quit. Smoking is a risk factor for heart disease.

According to the NHLBI, things you cannot change include:

- **Age and gender.** As people get older, their cholesterol levels rise. Before menopause, women tend to have lower total cholesterol levels than men. After menopause, women’s cholesterol levels tend to rise.
- **Heredity.** High cholesterol can run in families. Be sure to tell your doctor if someone in your family has high cholesterol. It is important for your doctor to know your family history.

How is high cholesterol treated?

If high cholesterol is treated, it may decrease the risk of developing heart disease. Your doctor can help you determine your level of risk and proper treatment if your risk level is high. Treatment of high cholesterol typically includes lifestyle changes and may also include medicine.

