



What is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a waxy, fatty material that your body makes. You can also find it in foods that come from animals, like meat, eggs, and cheese.

Your body needs some cholesterol to work right. The cells in your body use cholesterol to make hormones, vitamin D and the acids that help digest fat. Your body only needs a small amount of cholesterol to work right.

Cholesterol is fatty, and blood is watery. Just like oil and water, they do not mix. Cholesterol has to be carried through your blood in small packages called **lipoproteins** (lip-o-pro-teens).

Two kinds of lipoproteins carry cholesterol through your body. Low-density lipoprotein, called LDL, is known as “bad” cholesterol. High-density lipoprotein, called HDL, is known as “good” cholesterol.

Why should I care about my cholesterol?

- Too much LDL (bad) cholesterol in your blood can slowly build up in the arteries that go to your heart and brain. This buildup is called **plaque** (plak).
- Plaque can make your arteries narrow and less flexible. This condition is known as **atherosclerosis** (ath-er-o-skleh-ro-sis).
- If a blood clot gets stuck in a narrow artery, it can cause a heart attack or stroke.
- HDL (good) cholesterol helps the body get rid of bad cholesterol in the blood. The higher the level of HDL cholesterol, the better.
- High levels of HDL seem to protect you from having a heart attack.
- Low levels of HDL raise your chances of getting heart disease.

What should my cholesterol levels be?

- Your total cholesterol should be less than 200
- Your LDL cholesterol should be less than 130
- Your HDL cholesterol should be more than 40

What if my cholesterol is too high?

During your WISEWOMAN visit, we tested a sample of your blood. That told us your total cholesterol and HDL cholesterol. If your total cholesterol was too high, or your HDL cholesterol was too low, you will be sent for another test called a fasting lipoprotein panel. They will measure your total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, HDL cholesterol, and your Triglyceride levels.

Triglyceride (tri-glis-uh-rid) is a type of fat made in the body. You want your triglycerides to be less than 150.

How can I keep my cholesterol normal?

1. Eat more vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans
These foods can help lower your total cholesterol
2. Eat low fat or non fat dairy
By eating low fat cheese and drinking skim milk you put less cholesterol into your body
3. Don't smoke
Smoking lowers your HDL (good) cholesterol
4. Be active
Exercise can help lower your LDL (bad) cholesterol and triglycerides. It can also help raise your HDL (good) cholesterol.
5. Take your medicine
If your doctor wants you to take medicine to help you lower your cholesterol, take it. Remember, the medicine only works if you take it the way you are supposed to take it.

If you cannot pay for your cholesterol medicine, there are programs that may help you pay for your medicine. Talk to your lifestyle counselor or your doctor to see if you qualify.

Your WISEWOMAN lifestyle counselor can help you understand the healthy choices that will keep your cholesterol normal.

