



ALL ABOUT

Cholesterol information sheet

Approximately half of adult Australians have a total blood cholesterol level higher than what is recommended safe! This makes high cholesterol a major health concern in Australia.

Cholesterol is a white, waxy, fatty substance found in every cell in your body. It is an essential fat needed for many bodily functions including:

- Building the structure of cell membranes.
- Producing hormones like oestrogen, testosterone and adrenaline.
- Efficient metabolism.
- Production of bile acids which help the body digest fat and absorb nutrients.
- Aids in the production of vitamin D.

Fortunately your body, in particular the liver, is able to produce the amount of cholesterol needed to maintain these functions and no dietary sources of cholesterol are needed. There are different types of cholesterol - LDL, HDL and total.

- Low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol – carries most of the cholesterol that is delivered to cells. It is called the ‘bad’ cholesterol because it can clog up your arteries.
- High density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol – is called the ‘good’ cholesterol because it helps remove excess cholesterol out of the cells, including cells in the arteries.
- Total cholesterol - Total cholesterol is the LDL and HDL in your blood, plus the amount of triglycerides in your bloodstream. Triglycerides are fat. Fat cells store most of the triglycerides in your body but a small amount of triglycerides move through the blood so they are available as an instant source of energy for muscles. VLDL, or very low-density lipoproteins, carries triglycerides. High levels of total cholesterol are unhealthy, as are high levels of triglycerides.

GUIDELINES - HEALTHY CHOLESTEROL LEVELS.

Your total blood cholesterol will fall into one of these categories as shown in these tables.

Total cholesterol	Category
6.5 mmol/L or more	High risk
5.5 - 6.4 mmol/L	Increased risk
Less than 5.5 mmol/L	Healthy

Total HDL cholesterol	Category
Less than 1.0	Increased risk
1.0 or more	Healthy

BENEFITS OF IMPROVING YOUR CHOLESTEROL LEVELS.

Too much cholesterol circulating within LDL in our bloodstream leads to fatty deposits that develop in the arteries. This causes the vessels to narrow and they can eventually become blocked. Reducing your cholesterol is therefore good for the prevention of:

- Coronary artery disease
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Peripheral artery disease

WAYS TO REDUCE YOUR CHOLESTEROL LEVELS.

Changing your dietary and lifestyle habits may help reduce your cholesterol and triglyceride levels. Suggestions include:

- Reviewing your diet - Limit the amount of cholesterol-rich foods you eat. Increase the amount and variety of fresh fruit, vegetables and wholegrain foods you have each day. Choose low or reduced fat milk, yoghurt and other dairy products. Choose lean meat (meat trimmed of fat or labelled as 'heart smart').
- Cease alcohol consumption or reduce your alcohol intake to no more than one or two drinks a day. Avoid binge drinking. This will help lower your triglyceride levels.
- Don't smoke. Smoking increases the ability of LDL cholesterol to get into artery cells.
- Exercise regularly (for example, at least 30 minutes of brisk walking daily). Exercise increases the HDL levels, while reducing LDL and triglyceride levels in the body.
- Watch your waistline. Being overweight may contribute to raised blood triglyceride and LDL levels.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS.

My doctor hasn't said anything about my cholesterol, so I don't have to worry?

Unfortunately, not all physicians are as proactive about healthy lifestyles as they should be. Your health is your responsibility. Make sure that you have a blood cholesterol test and learn how to interpret all the numbers, including HDL (good) cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

If you're in a high or borderline-high range, discuss options with your physician. You may be able to control the levels by eating a diet lower in saturated fat and cholesterol, getting 30–60 minutes of physical activity on most days and quitting smoking. If lifestyle changes alone don't work, your physician may prescribe a cholesterol-lowering medication.

You don't need to have your cholesterol checked until you reach middle age?

It's a good idea to start having your cholesterol checked at an early age. Even children, especially those in families with a history of heart disease, can have high cholesterol levels: evidence exists that these children are at greater risk for developing heart disease as adults.



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