



From the desk of the Registered Dietitian: Rachel Robinson, RD, Chief Clinical Dietician



September is National Cholesterol Education Month

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a waxy substance that comes from two sources: your body and food. Your body makes all the cholesterol you need and circulates it through the blood, but cholesterol is also found in foods from animal sources, such as meat, poultry and full-fat dairy products. Your liver produces more cholesterol when you eat a diet high in saturated and trans fats. When your cholesterol is too high, it can become harder for your heart to circulate blood.

There are two types of cholesterol, commonly referred to simply as "good" and "bad." Too much of one type — or not enough of another — can put you at risk for coronary heart disease, heart attack or stroke. For this reason, the American Heart Association recommends all adults age 20 or older have their cholesterol, and other traditional risk factors, checked every four to six years. When determining cholesterol and risk of heart disease, your doctor will take into account risk factors such as age, family history, smoking and high blood pressure.

What do these numbers mean?

With HDL ("good") cholesterol, higher levels are better. Low HDL cholesterol puts you at higher risk for heart disease. People with high blood triglycerides usually also have lower HDL cholesterol. Consuming "good" fats found in foods like olive oil, walnuts, salmon, flaxseed, and avocado can increase HDL levels.

A low LDL ("bad") cholesterol level is considered good for your heart health. However, your LDL number should no longer be the main factor in guiding treatment to prevent heart attack and stroke, according to new guidelines from the American Heart Association. A diet high in saturated and trans fats raises LDL cholesterol.

How can I lower my cholesterol?

Besides medications, making healthy eating choices and increasing exercise are important steps in improving your cholesterol. Limit processed meats such as sausage, bologna, salami and hot dogs. Many processed meats are high in calories and saturated fat. They are often high in sodium as well. Read labels carefully and choose processed meats only occasionally.

Select lean cuts of meat with minimal visible fat. Select lean or extra lean ground beef. Trim all visible fat from meat before cooking. Choose white meat most often when eating poultry. Remove the skin from chicken or turkey before cooking.

Fiber acts as a natural sponge to soak up excess cholesterol in the body. Be sure to include whole grains like oats, brown rice, and bran cereal in your diet, as well as plenty of fruits and vegetables to meet your fiber needs.

Source: American Heart Association