

# Managing your cholesterol



**BlueCross  
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## Important Definitions

**Cholesterol is a natural substance made by your liver.**

Your body needs cholesterol to make hormones and work properly. Cholesterol is found naturally in your blood and your cells, as well as in many of the foods you eat. However, a high cholesterol level can increase your risk for heart disease and lead to serious problems such as heart attacks and stroke.

### **Some definitions you should know:**

**LDL cholesterol** means “low-density lipoprotein.” LDL transports the cholesterol from the liver to the tissues of the body, which is why it is called “bad” cholesterol.

**HDL cholesterol** means “high-density lipoprotein.” HDL transports cholesterol from the tissues of the body to the liver where it is removed from your body, which is why it is considered “good cholesterol.”

**Triglycerides** are the major form of fat stored by the body. They serve as the core structure of many types of lipids (fats). Triglycerides also enter the body from the food you eat.

**Total cholesterol** refers to all the types of cholesterol combined.

## Controlling Cholesterol

**What is a good plan to help control cholesterol?**

Lifestyle changes are an important part of controlling cholesterol. Making changes in your diet, exercise and weight will help put you on the path to better heart and overall health.

### **Diet**

Food choices have a major impact on your cholesterol levels. Having a “heart healthy” eating plan is one that emphasizes whole foods

like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, poultry, fish and nuts. Below are some ways to help improve your diet:

- **Cut back on trans fats**

- Trans fats are found in processed foods like snacks (crackers and chips) and baked goods (muffins, cookies and cakes) with hydrogenated oil or partially hydrogenated oil

- **Limit saturated fats**

- This type of fat is often found in animal products and certain oils that are solid at room temperature

**Foods containing saturated fats include:**

- Lard
- Fatback and salt pork
- High-fat meats: regular ground beef, bologna, hot dogs, sausage, bacon and spareribs
- High-fat dairy products: full-fat cheese, cream, ice cream, whole milk, 2 percent milk and sour cream
- Butter
- Cream sauces
- Gravy made with meat drippings
- Chocolate
- Coconut and coconut oil
- Poultry (chicken and turkey skin)
- Palm oil and palm kernel oil

- **Limit sugar and certain carbohydrates**

- Try to limit sweets and sugar-sweetened beverages like sodas
- Refined carbohydrates may include pastries, pasta, white rice, cake, cookies and white bread
- Too much sugar and refined carbohydrates may increase triglyceride levels

- **Eat more fiber**

- A high-soluble fiber diet can help reduce your risk of heart disease by blocking cholesterol and fats from being absorbed into the blood. Insoluble fiber helps with colon health. Some experts recommend around 25 grams of fiber per day for women and 38 grams for men. When you start eating more fiber, your belly might feel bloated, or you might have gas or cramps. You can avoid these side effects by adding fiber to your diet slowly. Some people feel worse when they eat more fiber or take fiber supplements. If you feel worse after adding more fiber to your diet, you can try decreasing the amount of fiber to see if that helps. Refer to this chart on food ideas to increase fiber in your diet.

**Soluble fiber**

- Beans and legumes like lentils and chickpeas
- Grains like oatmeal, oat bran and barley
- Some juices and fruits like oranges, pears, prunes and apples
- Vegetables like carrots, beets, broccoli and sweet potatoes

**Insoluble fiber**

- Whole grain foods
- Wheat and corn bran
- Nuts and seeds like walnuts, almonds, pistachios and sunflower seeds
- Vegetables like cabbage, kale, watercress, Brussels sprouts, peas, celery, eggplant, turnips and cauliflower

- **Choose foods with sterols and stanols**

- These help lower bad cholesterol (LDL) by working to block absorption of cholesterol from the stomach and intestines. Sterols and stanols are found naturally in fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds.





- Some people may benefit from limiting the amount of cholesterol they get from their diet. Ask your doctor what is right for you.

## Limit Alcohol

Drinking too much alcohol can increase your risk of heart disease. If you do drink alcohol, do so in moderation. Men should have no more than two drinks per day and women should have no more than one per day. One drink is 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine or 1 ounce of 80-proof liquor.

## Exercise

Exercise can help improve your cholesterol readings. Try to exercise for 150 minutes per week over time and work up to this slowly. Or, try to lower the time spent on sedentary activities by taking breaks to include more active time in your day. Brisk walking, gardening, jogging and swimming are some examples. Be sure to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise program.

## Weight Management

If you are overweight, losing weight can help lower your bad cholesterol (LDL) and triglycerides, while increasing your good cholesterol (HDL). Be sure to read the nutrition label on foods, as it provides the calories, portion size and nutritional value per serving. The nutrition label also helps you compare foods and keep track of your daily intake of food.

## Nutritional Values

Start here to compare foods and drinks: Every item has a different serving size. The numbers below reflect one serving size.

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>			
<b>Serving Size 1 tbsp (14g)</b>		<b>Servings Per Container 80</b>	
<b>Amount Per Serving</b>			
<b>Calories 50</b>		<b>Calories from Fat 50</b>	
—————▶		<b>% Daily Value</b>	
<b>Total Fat</b>			<b>9%</b>
<b>Saturated Fat 1.5g</b>			<b>8%</b>
<b>Trans Fat 0g</b>			
<b>Cholesterol 0mg</b>			<b>2%</b>
<b>Sodium 55mg</b>			<b>2%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate 0g</b>			<b>0%</b>
<b>Dietary Fiber 0g</b>			<b>0%</b>
<b>Sugar 0g</b>			
<b>Protein 0g</b>			
<b>Vitamin A</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>Calcium</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Vitamin E</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>Iron</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Vitamin C</b>	<b>0%</b>		
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.			
	Calories	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

• Serving size

• Check Calories per serving

• Percent of Daily Values

• Look here for Trans Fat

## Quit Tobacco Products

Quitting smoking increases your good cholesterol among other health benefits. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you need help quitting smoking. You can also visit [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov) or call **1-800-QUIT-NOW**. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield Service Benefit Plan has a free tobacco cessation program. Visit [www.fepblue.org](http://www.fepblue.org) for more information.

## Medications

Sometimes, in addition to lifestyle changes, medication for cholesterol is recommended if you have very high cholesterol and a history of heart attack, stroke, diabetes or other risk factors. Ask your doctor if further treatment to lower your cholesterol is right for you.

**Take your medication(s)** – If your doctor has prescribed medication to lower your cholesterol, it is important that you take it as it will help reduce the risk of a heart attack and stroke.

**Statins are a cholesterol lowering medicine** that may be prescribed to help prevent heart attacks, stroke and death from heart disease. Some people may benefit from statins regardless of cholesterol readings due to certain health risk factors.



**Cholesterol screening** is generally recommended for adults over age 40. Ask your doctor if a lipid panel is recommended to determine if statin therapy is a good option for you. Your doctor may also check your coronary artery calcium (CAC) to help decide if you would benefit from taking a statin.

Many people do well on a statin. Some people may not be able to take a statin medicine due to side effects. Statin side effects are rare and can often be managed by talking to your doctor about your options first. Do not stop taking your medicines on your own.



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