

Numbers you need to know

We humans are all about numbers. Phone numbers, account numbers, passwords – even ages. We all have some that are important to us. Is your cholesterol one of them? If it's not on your list, it should be. That's because about one in six adult Americans, or 102 million people, have high blood cholesterol. And more than 35 million of those people have cholesterol levels high enough to increase their risk for heart disease.*

Cholesterol – in the right amount – isn't all bad. And it isn't just one number. The fat-like substance is made up of several things, and it's something our bodies need to keep running smoothly. There's good cholesterol, called HDL, which helps flush other cholesterol out of your body. You want to have more of this type. And then there's LDL, the bad one, which causes health problems. You want to keep that type low. If you have too much LDL, the waxy goo builds up in your arteries causing them to narrow and putting you at higher risk for heart disease and stroke.

So, where does cholesterol come from? Our bodies make all we need, but it's also in some foods. These foods contain saturated fats, which mostly come from animals and can be found in egg yolks, meat and dairy products. Cholesterol is also in some vegetable oils, such as palm oil. And in trans fatty acids, also called trans fats, which are included in many snack foods, fast foods and baked goods.

Many people don't know their cholesterol numbers. And, because high cholesterol usually doesn't have symptoms, many of them don't know their level is high enough to raise their risk for poor health.

Fortunately, a simple blood test done by your doctor or other health care provider can tell you. Your current health status will help you and your doctor determine how often you should have your cholesterol checked. If your numbers are high, there are some lifestyle choices that can help such as:

- Eating low-fat and high-fiber foods like fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains
- Exercising on a regular basis
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Quitting smoking

If needed, there are also medications available that can help lower your cholesterol level.



Certain factual or statistical information was derived from the following sources:

*cdc.gov/cholesterol

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