High Cholesterol

What is high cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that your body needs. But, when you have too much in your blood, it can build up on the walls of your arteries. This can lead to heart disease and stroke—leading causes of death in the United States.[1]

Are you at risk?

About one in every six adult Americans has high cholesterol.[2] Anyone, including children, can develop it.

Several factors that are beyond your control can increase your risk. These include your age, sex, and heredity. But, there are some risk factors that you can change. Examples include eating an unhealthy diet, being overweight, and not getting enough exercise.

[1] CDC: Deaths: Final Data for 2008. *www.cdc.gov/nchs/ data/nvsr/nvsr59/nvsr59_10.pdf*

[2] CDC: High serum total cholesterol—an indicator for monitoring cholesterol lowering efforts; U.S. adults, 2005–2006. *www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/ databriefs/db02.pdf*

What are the signs and symptoms?

High cholesterol itself does not have symptoms. Many people do not know that their cholesterol level is high. That's why it's important to schedule regular visits with your doctor. Be sure to ask about having your cholesterol tested.

How is high cholesterol diagnosed?

Doctors can do a simple blood test to check your cholesterol. Most adults should get their cholesterol levels checked every five years. If your total cholesterol is 200 mg/dL* or more, or if your HDL (good cholesterol) is less than 40 mg/dL, you will need to have a lipoprotein profile blood test done. Ask your doctor about what may be right for you.

What levels of cholesterol are healthy?

	Desirable Levels
Total cholesterol	Less than 200 mg/dL*
LDL ("bad" cholesterol)	Less than 100 mg/dL
HDL ("good" cholesterol)	40 mg/dL or higher
Triglycerides	Less than 150 mg/dL

* Cholesterol levels are measured in milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per deciliter (dL) of blood.

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention

CDC

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How is it treated?

Lowering high cholesterol levels is important for people at all ages, with and without heart disease. If you have high cholesterol, you will need to eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, quit smoking, and you may need to take medication.

Can it be prevented?

You can take several steps to maintain a normal cholesterol level:

- Eat a healthy diet. A high amount of saturated fat and cholesterol in food that you eat can increase blood cholesterol. Tips on reducing saturated fat in your diet are available on the Web site for CDC's Division for Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity.
  http://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/everyone/ basics/fat/saturatedfat.html

- Maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight can increase your cholesterol level. Losing weight can help lower your LDL (bad) cholesterol and total cholesterol level, and raise your HDL (good) cholesterol level. CDC's Healthy Weight Web site includes information and tools to help you lose weight.
  http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/ index.html

- Exercise regularly. Regular physical activity can help lower LDL (bad) cholesterol and raise HDL (good) cholesterol. You should try to be physically active for 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes) each week. Visit CDC's Physical Activity Web site for more information on being active.
  http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/ index.html

- Don't smoke. CDC's Office on Smoking and Health Web site has information on quitting smoking.
  http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco

For More Information:

Learn more at the following Web sites.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention:
  http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/index.htm

- American Heart Association:
  http://www.americanheart.org

- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute:
  http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov

- MedlinePlus:
  http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ cholesterol.html