



# What Are High Blood Cholesterol and Triglycerides?



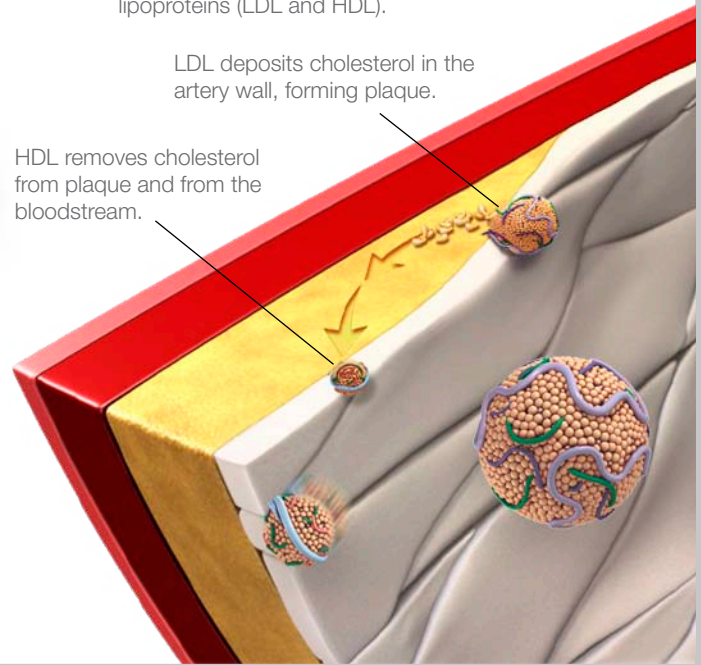
Cholesterol is a soft, fat-like substance found in the bloodstream and in all your body's cells. Your body makes all the cholesterol it needs.

The saturated and *trans* fats you eat may raise your blood cholesterol level. Having too much cholesterol in your blood may lead to increased risk for heart disease and stroke.

Cholesterol travels to the body's cells through the bloodstream by way of lipoproteins (LDL and HDL).

LDL deposits cholesterol in the artery wall, forming plaque.

HDL removes cholesterol from plaque and from the bloodstream.



## What's so bad about high blood cholesterol?

Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol is often called "the bad kind." When you have too much LDL cholesterol in your blood, it can join with fats and other substances to build up in the inner walls of your arteries. The arteries can become clogged and narrow, and blood flow is reduced. If this buildup of plaque ruptures, a blood clot may form at this location or a piece may break off and travel in the bloodstream. If a blood clot blocks the blood flow to your heart, it causes a heart attack. If a blood clot blocks an artery leading to or in the brain, a stroke results.

High-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol is called the "good kind." It carries harmful cholesterol away from the arteries and helps protect you from heart attack and stroke. It's better to have a lot of HDL cholesterol in your blood.

## How can I control my cholesterol?

- Cut down on foods high in saturated and *trans* fats. These include fatty meats, organ meats such as liver, shellfish, cheese, whole-milk dairy products, and solid

fats such as butter. Aim for 5-6% of your total calories or less from saturated fats.

- Do an average of 40 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic activity 3 or 4 times per week.
- Include a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in your diet. Select low-fat dairy products and eat poultry, fish, and nuts. Limit sweets, sugar-sweetened beverages, sodium, and red meats.
- Reach and maintain a healthy weight. If you are overweight or obese, losing weight can help improve your lipid profile.
- If you can't improve your cholesterol through lifestyle changes alone, ask your doctor about medicines that can help.

## What are triglycerides?

Triglycerides are the most common type of fat in your body. They come from food, and your body also makes them. High levels of blood triglycerides are often found in people who have high cholesterol levels, heart problems, are overweight or have diabetes.

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### What about fats?

There are different kinds of fats in the foods we eat.

- **Saturated fat** raises blood cholesterol, so too much is not good for you. Aim for a diet that has 5-6% or less of calories from saturated fats. Animal fats like lard and meat fat, and some tropical oils like coconut oil, palm oil and palm kernel oil contain saturated fats.
- **Trans fat** comes from adding hydrogen to vegetable oils and tends to raise blood cholesterol. It's used in commercial baked goods and for cooking in many restaurants and fast-food chains. It's also found naturally in milk and beef. Reduce the amount of trans fat in your diet by limiting foods with "hydrogenated oils" in the ingredients list.
- **Polyunsaturated fats** are found in vegetable oils and fish oils. These can improve blood cholesterol when eaten as part of a healthy diet and used to replace saturated or *trans* fats.
- **Monounsaturated fats** are found in olive, canola, peanut, sunflower and safflower oils. As part of a healthy diet, they may help improve blood cholesterol.



You can help improve your cholesterol by eating foods that are lower in saturated and *trans* fats.

### HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at **heartinsight.org**.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by join-ing our Support Network at **heart.org/supportnetwork**.

### Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

**Will I need cholesterol-lowering medicine?**

**How does exercise affect my levels?**

### My Questions:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.