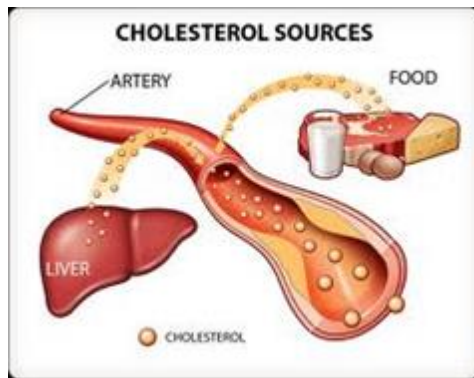


Cholesterol

Cholesterol is one of the fats in our blood. It is a waxy, fat-like substance and our liver makes about 80% of it. The remainder comes from certain foods we eat such as animal fats, dairy products, eggs and meat. The body needs a limited amount of cholesterol in order to function properly. Its cell walls, or membranes need cholesterol in order to produce hormones, vitamin D, and the bile acids that help digest fat. Studies have shown that when too much cholesterol is present, health problems such as heart disease may develop.



Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol is often called the “bad cholesterol” because it promotes the buildup of plaque in the artery walls when high levels are present in our blood.

High-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol is called the “good cholesterol” because it helps carry LDL cholesterol away from the artery walls.

Triglycerides are not a type of cholesterol however they are another type of fat that is found in the blood. High triglyceride levels are associated with excess weight, excess alcohol consumption and diabetes.

Atherosclerosis:

High levels of LDL-C (“bad cholesterol”) and low levels of HDL-C (the “good cholesterol”) in the blood have been linked to atherosclerosis.

Atherosclerosis occurs when plaque (a hard deposit of cholesterol and other substances from the blood) builds up on the blood vessel walls, which makes them harder and narrower.

Plaques can also break off, increasing the risk of blood clots that can block the blood vessels.

Many foods contain small amounts of cholesterol but evidence suggests that saturated fats and trans- fats in our diet have the greatest impact on blood levels. Saturated fats are usually found in meat and dairy products, which is why it is important to look not only at cholesterol levels in foods but also at how much saturated fat the food contains.

The production of cholesterol in your liver is affected by your family history (genetics) and how your liver functions. This means that your diet and lifestyle are not the only things causing high cholesterol levels.

Your risk of high cholesterol also increases with age. It is important to begin testing at the age of 20 and have follow-up tests as often as your doctor recommends.

In Canada, cholesterol levels are measured in millimoles (mmol) per liter (L) of blood. The following are general cholesterol level guidelines. Your doctor is the best person to discuss your personal levels and risk factors with you. He or she may adjust these levels based on your history and risk for heart disease:

	Acceptable	Borderline	High
Total	Below 5.2 mmol/L	5.2 – 6.2 mmol/L	Over 6.2 mmol/L
LDL	2.6 – 3.3 mmol/L	3.4 – 4.1 mmol/L	4.1 – 4.9 mmol/L
HDL	Men-1 mmol/L	Men-1.3 mmol/L	Over 1.6 mmol/L
	Women-1.3mmol/L	Women 1.3-1.5mmol/L	
Triglycerides	Below 1.7 mmol/L	1.7 – 2.2 mmol/L	2.3 – 5.6 mmol/L

If you have already tried making lifestyle changes and are still showing high levels of cholesterol, your doctor may suggest medication. Statins are medications that lower cholesterol. Lowering your cholesterol and lipid levels may reduce your risk of having a heart attack.

Resources

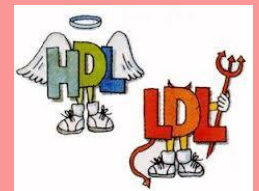
Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation
Body & Health Canada
Mayo Clinic

Fun Food Facts!



The name cholesterol originates from the Greek chole- (bile) and stereos (solid), and the chemical suffix -ol, for alcohol.

Did You Know?



Tips on getting your cholesterol level in check:

- ✓ Reduce fat intake to 20-35% of your daily calories
- ✓ Choose “healthy fats”
- ✓ Limit your intake of saturated fat
- ✓ Avoid fried foods
- ✓ Don't smoke
- ✓ Exercise regularly

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