

Managing your cholesterol



Cholesterol and triglycerides

Cholesterol is a waxy fat-like substance in your blood. Your liver makes most of it and you also get some from the food you eat.

There are 2 main types of cholesterol:

- **Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol** – often called ‘bad cholesterol’. It carries cholesterol from your liver to your cells.
- **High-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol** – often called ‘good cholesterol’. It works like a cleaner, carrying extra LDL cholesterol away from your arteries to be broken down in your liver.

Triglycerides are the most common type of fat in your blood. Your body makes them from extra energy in food and drink when you consume more than your body needs.

My cholesterol:

LDL: **HDL:** **Triglycerides:** **Ratio:**

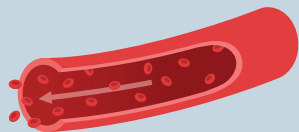
What is high cholesterol?

If you’ve been diagnosed with high cholesterol it is because there’s too much LDL cholesterol and/or not enough HDL cholesterol in your blood. You may also have high triglycerides.

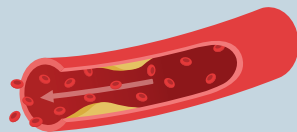
There’s no single ‘normal’ cholesterol level for everyone. Your ideal level depends on your overall risk of heart attack or stroke. The table below is a rough guide. Your doctor or nurse will explain what’s ideal for you.

	People diagnosed with high cholesterol, heart disease, diabetes or at high risk of heart disease	People without major heart disease risk factors
LDL cholesterol	Less than 1.4mmol/L	Less than 2.6mmol/L
HDL cholesterol	More than 1.0mmol/L	More than 1.0mmol/L
Triglycerides	Less than 1.8mmol/L	Less than 2.0mmol/L
Total/HDL ratio	Less than 4.0	Less than 4.5

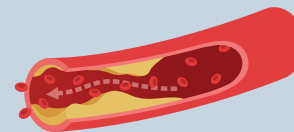
High cholesterol increases your risk of heart attack and stroke



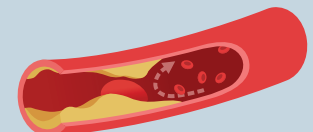
In a normal artery blood flows easily.



High cholesterol leads to a build-up of fatty deposits called plaque on the artery walls.



A blood clot forms on the plaque. Less blood flows through the artery.



The blood clot blocks the artery. No blood can flow through.



Plaque build-up



Red blood cells



Blood clot

Why high cholesterol matters

When you have too much LDL cholesterol and/or high triglycerides, it can build up on the walls of your arteries as plaque. These fatty deposits can cause a blood clot, which can lead to a heart attack or stroke.

What are the symptoms of high cholesterol?

High cholesterol does not cause symptoms. The only way to know is with a blood test.



Cran's story

Cran initially ignored his high cholesterol because he felt “too skinny and active” to be at risk. But after some warning signs, he reduced his cholesterol with medication and lifestyle changes.

“The key thing for me was to overcome my denial. You have to accept that you have something internal going on for yourself and to make a psychological shift in your head so that acceptance becomes part of the adjusting process.”

What increases your cholesterol?

High cholesterol has many causes. Some you can't change, like age and family history. Some genetic conditions can cause high cholesterol.

Causes you can change or manage



Too much food high in saturated fat



Too much sugar, refined carbohydrates or ultra-processed foods



Unhealthy weight, especially around your middle



Not moving enough



Smoking



Too much alcohol



Diabetes



Kidney or liver disease



Cholesterol medication

Taking your cholesterol medication every day as prescribed reduces your risk of a heart attack or stroke. Set a daily reminder to take medications, and a calendar reminder to order a repeat prescription before you run out.

My cholesterol medications:

Ways to lower your cholesterol

Small changes can make a big difference to your cholesterol. Here are some suggestions to try. Making long-term changes will reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke.



Manage your weight

Maintaining a healthy weight can help lower LDL cholesterol and reduce strain on your heart.



Eat food that is good for your heart

Eat real foods that are less processed. Include lots of whole grains, fruit and vegetables, and healthy fats such as nuts, seeds and oily fish.



Sit less, move more

Aim for at least 2½ hours (150 minutes) of moderate activity each week.



Don't drink alcohol or drink less

Alcohol can raise your LDL cholesterol and triglycerides. No alcohol is best for heart health. If you do drink alcohol, it's better to drink less.



If you smoke, quit smoking

Quitting smoking will help lower your cholesterol and is important for your heart health.

Some changes I can make:

High cholesterol and heart attack risk

High cholesterol is one of the causes of heart attack and stroke.

Other risk factors include high blood pressure, diabetes, lack of exercise, alcohol intake, weight, unhealthy food and smoking.

The more risk factors you have, the greater your risk of heart attack.

A **heart risk check** will tell you your risk of a heart attack or stroke over the next 5 years. It is done by your doctor or nurse. Ask them when you're due for one.

Our online heart health check gives an estimate of your heart attack risk and when you're due for your first check with your doctor. It also shows how lowering your cholesterol reduces your risk.



My current estimated risk of a heart attack and stroke is:

☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High %



You have
the power to
improve your
heart health



How often do I need a cholesterol test and where?

If you haven't had a cholesterol test before, talk to your doctor or nurse about when you should have one.

You may also need regular tests if you:

- take cholesterol-lowering medicines
- have a family history of high cholesterol
- have diabetes, kidney or liver disease, or an underactive thyroid
- are at higher risk of heart attack or stroke.

High cholesterol checklist

- ☐ I know changes I can make to manage my cholesterol
- ☐ I know my risk of heart attack and stroke
- ☐ I know my cholesterol medications and when to take them
- ☐ I've reviewed the cholesterol resources on the Heart Foundation website

Looking for more information on cholesterol?

Scan this QR code, call our Heart Line on 0800 863 375
or visit heartfoundation.org.nz/cholesterol

