

Cholesterol and triglycerides:

the good, the bad, and what it means to you

Most patients with diabetes should aim for these goals

LDL cholesterol

✓ less than
100
mg/dL

HDL cholesterol

✓ more than
40
mg/dL
(men)

✓ more than
50
mg/dL
(women)

Triglycerides

✓ less than
150
mg/dL

Why should I care about cholesterol and triglycerides?

7 out of 10 people with diabetes have high cholesterol. High cholesterol is a major cause of heart disease. And for people with diabetes, heart disease is the leading cause of death.

But here's the good news. By controlling blood sugar and cholesterol you can reduce your risk of heart disease and increase your chance of living a longer, healthier life.

What are cholesterol and triglycerides?

Cholesterol and triglycerides are also known as blood lipids. *Lipid* is another word for fat or fatlike substances. Cholesterol can come from the food you eat, but your liver creates about 80% of it. Your body needs cholesterol, but too much can lead to serious health problems, such as heart attack and stroke.

Triglycerides are another type of fat in your blood. Like cholesterol, they can come from the food you eat or your body can create them. High triglycerides, like high cholesterol, are unhealthy.

What does cholesterol do?

Cholesterol is important. It helps you digest food and create new cells. To do these things, cholesterol must travel to all parts of your body. But it cannot travel on its own. It needs to link to other compounds in your blood called lipoproteins.

There are different types of cholesterol.

- **Low-density lipoprotein (LDL)** cholesterol carries fat and cholesterol from the liver to the rest of your body. LDL cholesterol is considered “bad” because it can build up in the walls of your arteries, forming plaque. Plaque buildup reduces blood flow to your heart and brain. This can lead to heart attack or stroke.
- **High-density lipoprotein (HDL)** cholesterol returns cholesterol to the liver, which removes it from the body. HDL cholesterol is “good” because it helps your body remove cholesterol.



What can I do to keep my cholesterol and triglycerides at healthy levels?

If your blood lipids are too high, here are some ways you and your doctor can help you to gain control:

Maintain a healthy weight

- Losing weight can help lower your triglycerides and total and LDL cholesterol levels

Eat healthier

- Look for foods that are low in saturated fats, trans fats, and cholesterol
- Eat low-cholesterol, low-fat foods, such as:
 - Fish and poultry
 - Fat-free or low-fat milk and cheeses
 - Fruits and vegetables
 - Cereals, breads, rice, and pasta made from whole grains
- Avoid high-cholesterol, high-fat foods, such as:
 - Organ meats, like liver
 - Egg yolks
 - Butter and oil
 - Packaged and processed foods

Get active

- Exercise for at least 30 minutes a day, at least 3 times a week. This can lower LDL cholesterol and raise HDL cholesterol. Talk to your doctor before beginning any exercise program.

What if my cholesterol is still too high?

Many people need the extra help of medication to lower their cholesterol. If you are one of them, make sure you follow your healthcare provider's directions.

It is very important to keep your appointments with your healthcare provider. This will let you both know how well you are doing and give you an opportunity to discuss how you are feeling. You should also talk to your doctor about your medication and any side effects you may be experiencing.

Medication can help control high cholesterol, but there is no cure. To keep your cholesterol controlled, keep taking your medications as instructed by your physician.

If you need more help managing your blood lipids,

remember, you are not alone. Ask your healthcare provider for the help you need. By working together, you can get your blood glucose and your cholesterol under control for a healthier future.

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