

Why to Monitor Cholesterol

Lowering your cholesterol through diet and lifestyle

Cholesterol is a type of fat (lipid), found both in the body and in certain foods. It has spent its fair share of time in the news because of its association with heart disease and stroke, but in fact, cholesterol is a vital substance, found in the blood and in every cell of the body. It is one of the building blocks of cell membranes, and the body uses it to make vitamin D and hormones.

However, too much cholesterol in the blood can increase your risk of heart disease and stroke by leading to a buildup of plaque on artery walls. Eventually, the plaque can narrow the arteries (atherosclerosis), reducing blood flow. If a blood clot forms and blocks an artery to the heart artery, a heart attack can occur. If a blood clot blocks an artery to or in the brain, a stroke results.

The trick is to ensure that you have the right balance of cholesterol in the blood. If your cholesterol level is too high, making simple dietary and lifestyle changes . such as eating less fat and increasing physical activity . can lower your cholesterol, and therefore your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Heart disease and stroke

Why is it so important to watch your cholesterol? **In Canada, 45% of men and 43% of women have unhealthy cholesterol levels.** Most heart and blood vessel disease is caused by a buildup of cholesterol, plaque and other fatty deposits on artery walls. Cardiovascular disease accounts for the death of more Canadians than any other disease; and stroke is the fourth leading cause of death in Canada.

There is only one way to find out if your cholesterol is too high, and that is to be tested.

Talk to your doctor about testing your cholesterol if you have any of these risk factors:

- you are male and over 40 years of age
- you are female and over 50 years of age (or post-menopausal)
- you have heart disease, stroke, diabetes or high blood pressure
- you have a family history of heart disease or stroke
- you are of First Nations, African or South Asian descent
- you have excess fat around your waist (a circumference of more than 102 centimetres [40 inches] for men and 88 centimetres [35 inches] for women)
- you smoke
- you don't exercise.

Finding out if you are at risk for heart disease and stroke will give you the opportunity to make important diet and lifestyle changes . changes that can significantly reduce your risks. And the sooner you find out, and begin making changes, the better. Your reward will not only include lower cholesterol, but better health, and increased energy, vitality and longevity.

All about cholesterol

Cholesterol is a soft waxy substance. The word **cholesterol** can refer to either blood cholesterol (cholesterol found in the body) or dietary cholesterol (cholesterol found in foods). Blood cholesterol, made by the liver, comprises about 80% of the cholesterol in the body. The remaining 20% comes from the foods we eat. Cholesterol is transported in the blood by lipoproteins. There are two main types of cholesterol:

1. **Low-density lipoproteins (LDL)** deliver cholesterol to the body. This type is often called **%bad+** cholesterol because too much LDL cholesterol can build up on artery walls.
2. **High-density lipoproteins (HDL)** remove cholesterol from the body. HDL cholesterol is called **%good+** cholesterol because it helps carry LDL cholesterol away from artery walls.

Lifestyle and cholesterol levels

The good news about cholesterol is that it can usually be lowered by eating less LDL cholesterol-increasing foods and more LDL cholesterol-lowering foods, and by adopting a healthy lifestyle.

The most important steps to following a healthy lifestyle are:

1. decreasing the amount of fat in your diet
2. paying special attention to the quality of fat that you eat
3. maintaining a healthy weight
4. quitting smoking
5. getting adequate exercise
6. reducing stress.

All of these factors, taken together, can dramatically decrease your risk of heart disease and stroke by lowering your LDL cholesterol level and your blood pressure, and raising your HDL cholesterol.

*(Retrieved from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care,
<http://www.mhp.gov.on.ca/en/healthy-eating/cholesterol.asp>)*

MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND LONG-TERM CARE

More cholesterol facts

- People with high cholesterol have about **twice the risk** of heart disease as people with lower levels.
- Only **1 out of every 3** adults with high LDL cholesterol has the condition under control.
- **Less than half** of adults with high LDL cholesterol get treatment.
- Lowering your cholesterol can reduce your risk of having a heart attack, needing heart bypass surgery or angioplasty, and dying of heart disease.

- High cholesterol has no symptoms; so many people don't know that their cholesterol is too high. Your doctor can do a simple blood test to check your levels.

(Retrieved from the CDC, http://www.cdc.gov/dhbsp/data_statistics/fact_sheets/fs_cholesterol.htm)



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CDC 24/7: Saving Lives. Protecting People.™