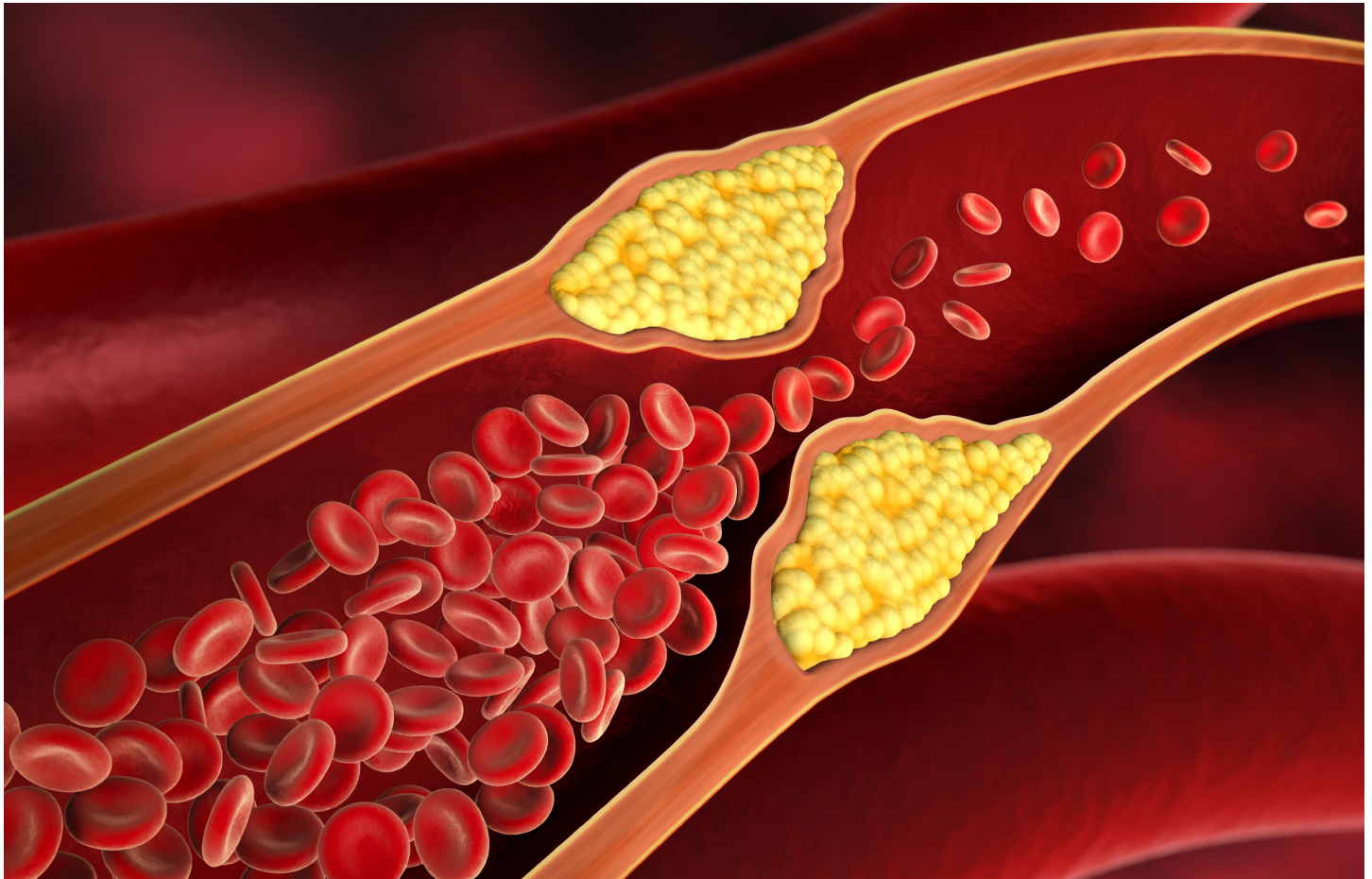


# Cholesterol 101

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## What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance found in all cells of the body. Our bodies naturally make cholesterol. Foods we eat can also impact the levels in our blood. Cholesterol is needed for the body to function properly, but too much cholesterol in our blood can have an impact on our health.

## Types of Cholesterol

*Low-density lipoprotein* (LDL) is one type of cholesterol in our blood. Excess levels of LDL in your blood can stick together in your arteries. This buildup can narrow and even block arteries, making it difficult for blood to flow, which can lead to a blood clot, stroke, or heart attack.

The other type of cholesterol is *high-density lipoprotein* (HDL). HDL carries excess cholesterol away from the arteries and helps prevent them from getting clogged. Higher levels of HDL in the blood can lower the risk of heart disease.

## Am I at risk?

Some *lifestyle factors* can increase the risk of elevated cholesterol levels. These include drug and alcohol use, eating patterns high in saturated fats, and not engaging in physical activity.

Additional risk factors include some *pre-existing conditions* such as diabetes, prior heart attack or stroke, and high blood pressure.

For some people, high LDL cholesterol levels can be genetic. This condition is known as *familial hypercholesterolemia* (FH). People with FH are born with high cholesterol and levels can increase with time. This condition cannot be treated with diet and physical activity alone. Your healthcare provider will prescribe medication.

## How can I check my cholesterol levels?

Your healthcare provider can order a blood test called a lipid panel or lipid profile to determine blood cholesterol levels. The test will measure total cholesterol, LDL and HDL cholesterol, and triglycerides, another type of fat in the blood. High levels of triglycerides can contribute to cholesterol buildup and increase the risk of heart disease.

High blood cholesterol levels do not cause observable symptoms and may go undetected. Generally, it is recommended that healthy adults get cholesterol levels checked every four to six years. Those at higher risk or with a family history of heart disease may get checked more often.

## How can I manage my cholesterol levels?

### Manage Cholesterol Levels with Food

The foods we eat and how they are prepared can impact cholesterol levels. Foods high in saturated fat can increase LDL cholesterol levels in the blood. Rather than focusing on the cholesterol content of foods, choose foods low in saturated fat to improve cholesterol levels. Incorporating foods high in fiber and unsaturated fats can increase HDL levels in blood and reduce the risk of heart disease.

### Managing Cholesterol Levels with Movement and More

Regular physical activity can help lower your LDL levels and raise your HDL levels. Find movement you enjoy like walking, biking, and swimming and aim for involvement for at least 30 minutes on five or more days of the week. Short bursts of activity, like 10 minutes at a time, add up. Engaging in physical activity provides many benefits for heart health.

Limit tobacco and alcohol use, as they can increase LDL and triglyceride levels while lowering HDL levels.

People with higher body weight may have higher LDL cholesterol levels. Incorporating more high fiber foods, lowering saturated fat foods, minimizing tobacco and alcohol use, and engaging in regular activity can both support weight maintenance and lead to lower LDL cholesterol levels. Together, these changes support your heart health.

Your healthcare provider may prescribe cholesterol-lowering medication. Sometimes making changes in your diet and increasing activity levels is not enough to lower LDL levels. Incorporating some of these lifestyle changes along with medication use can further support your overall health and wellbeing.

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