How Do My Cholesterol Levels Affect My Risk?

High cholesterol can increase your risk of heart attack and stroke. If you're 20 or older, you should have your traditional risk factors (including cholesterol) checked every 4 to 6 years. If certain factors put you at risk, or if you already have heart disease, your healthcare provider may need you to have it checked more often.

What should my cholesterol levels be?

The best approach to risk reduction goes beyond cholesterol levels alone. It considers overall risk assessment and reduction.

It's still important to know your numbers, but work with your healthcare provider to treat your risk. They will assess your risk factors and work with you to choose the best treatment options.

- If you're between 40 and 75, ask your healthcare provider to assess your 10-year risk.
- If you're between 20 and 39, your healthcare provider should assess your lifetime risk. If your risks are high, lifestyle and statin medication may help manage your risk

If your risk remains uncertain, and treatment options are unclear, your healthcare provider may request a coronary artery calcium (CAC) measurement to provide greater insight into your risk and help in decision-making.

You can find out your risk with our Check. Change. Control. Calculator™. In minutes, you'll learn your risk for a heart attack or stroke.

How will I know my numbers?

Your healthcare provider will do a blood test to measure your cholesterol levels. This may be a "fasting" or "non-fasting lipoprotein profile". It assesses several types of fat in the blood. It is measured in milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL).

The test gives you four results: total cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol and HDL (good) cholesterol, and triglycerides (blood fats).

What is HDL cholesterol?

HDL cholesterol is called "good" cholesterol. Having a higher level of HDL can lower your risk of heart attack and stroke.

HDL takes cholesterol away from your arteries and back to the liver. There, it's processed so that excess can be removed from your body. HDL may also remove cholesterol from plaque in the arteries.

What is LDL cholesterol?

LDL cholesterol is known as "bad" cholesterol. The

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body's tissues use some of this cholesterol to build cells. But when you have too much of it, LDL can build up inside your arteries.

Together with other substances, it can form plaque (a thick, hard, fatty deposit). Plaque narrows the arteries and reduces blood flow. This is called atherosclerosis. If the buildup of plaque ruptures, a blood clot may form at this location or a piece may break off and travel in the bloodstream, causing a heart attack or stroke.

With LDL, lower is better.

What are triglycerides?

Triglycerides are the most common type of fat in your body. They're also a major energy source. They come from food, and your body also makes them.

As people get older, gain excess weight (or both), their triglyceride and cholesterol levels tend to rise.

Should I track my numbers?

You can use the chart below to keep track of your numbers each time you have a test.

Make sure you discuss with your healthcare provider how these numbers and other risk factors you have affect your overall risk.

	1st Visit	2nd Visit	3rd Visit	4th Visit
Total Blood Cholesterol				
LDL Cholesterol				
HDL Cholesterol				
Triglycerides				

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

1. Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
2. Sign up to get ***Heart Insight***, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at **heartinsight.org**.
3. Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at **heart.org/supportnetwork**.

Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

How often should I have my cholesterol checked?

How can I reduce my cholesterol?

My Questions:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.

American Heart Association.