



American Heart Association

Reduce Your Risk™

# WHY SHOULD I KNOW MY LDL CHOLESTEROL?

LDL cholesterol is often called “bad” cholesterol because it can build up in your arteries. Over time, this can narrow your arteries and raise your risk for heart attack and stroke.

## How can I check my LDL level?

High cholesterol usually has no symptoms. It's important to have your cholesterol tested, so you can know your levels and risk for heart attack and stroke. Ask your doctor for a test called a lipid panel. It may be a fasting or non-fasting test, depending on what works best for your situation. A lipid panel measures:

- LDL "bad" cholesterol
- HDL "good" cholesterol
- Triglycerides (most common type of fat)
- Total cholesterol

## What can I do if my LDL is high?

Talk to your doctor about the right treatment plan for you. You might try:

- Adding more physical activity that you enjoy
- Finding ways to reach or maintain a healthy weight
- Eating more vegetables, fruits and whole grains
- If you smoke, exploring support to help you quit

Sometimes lifestyle changes alone aren't enough. In some cases, cholesterol-lowering medication may also be needed. You and your doctor can explore options that are right for you.



**Take action to live a longer, healthier life. Take control of your health by controlling your LDL. You can help motivate your loved ones to know their levels, too.**



## Does my LDL level affect my heart attack and stroke risk?

When cholesterol stays high, it can join with other substances to form a thick, hard deposit called plaque inside the arteries. Over time, this can narrow the arteries and make them less flexible, a condition known as **atherosclerosis**. If blood flow becomes blocked, it can lead to a heart attack or stroke.

## What should my LDL level be?

There isn't one “normal” LDL level that works for everyone. Lower LDL levels are linked with better heart and brain health. The right goal for you depends on your personal health picture, including:

- Age
- Overall health
- Family history
- If you have Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes
- History of heart attack or stroke

For some people, an LDL goal may be below 100 mg/dL. For others, the goal may be below 70 mg/dL or below 55 mg/dL for people at very high risk of a heart attack or stroke. Your doctor can help determine the goal that's right for you.

Learn more about [heart.org/ldl](https://www.heart.org/ldl)