



American Heart Association.
Reduce Your Risk™

WHAT DOES MY LDL CHOLESTEROL LEVEL MEAN?

Low-density lipoprotein (LDL), is often called “bad” cholesterol because it can build up in your arteries. Over time, this can narrow your arteries and increase your risk for heart attack, stroke and peripheral artery disease (PAD).



What can impact my LDL level?

- **Family history of high cholesterol**, including genetic conditions such as familial hypercholesterolemia (FH), an inherited condition in which people are born with very high LDL cholesterol levels
- **Diet high in saturated fats and trans fats**
- **Being less physically active**
- **Being overweight**
- **Tobacco use** or exposure to **secondhand smoke**

How low can I go with my LDL?

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 overall health and risk. Your LDL goal may be based on factors such as:

- Age
- Overall health
- Family history
- Diabetes (Type 1 or Type 2)
- Personal history of heart attack or stroke

Depending on your situation, your LDL goal may be below 100 mg/dL, 70 mg/dL, or even 55 mg/dL if you are at very high risk for a heart attack or stroke. Your doctor can help determine the goal that's right for you.

How often should I check my LDL?

Your doctor can help determine the right schedule based on your risk factors. According to the American Heart Association, for most adults, cholesterol screening every five years starting at age 19 works well. Ask your doctor for the right frequency for you.

Make a plan that works for you!

By working together, you and your doctor can explore options that fit your situation.

- ✓ Eat a heart-healthy diet
- ✓ Get regular physical activity
- ✓ Achieve and maintain a healthy weight
- ✓ Avoid tobacco products

Sometimes lifestyle changes alone aren't enough, and cholesterol-lowering medication may be needed too. You and your doctor can work together to explore options that are right for you.

Be sure to write down questions or concerns and talk with your doctor if you need support with your treatment plan.

Learn more at heart.org/LDL

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