

Health care tips

Medications to treat high cholesterol

What is cholesterol?¹

Cholesterol is a waxy, fatty substance in your body. Your body needs some cholesterol to work well.

There are two main types of cholesterol:

1. Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) is the “bad” cholesterol. When you have high cholesterol, you have too much LDL cholesterol in your blood. It can stick to the walls of your blood vessels and clog them. Over time, this can slow the flow of blood to your heart and brain. High LDL cholesterol can lead to many serious conditions, like heart disease and stroke.
2. High-density lipoprotein (HDL) is the “good” cholesterol. It picks up and removes bad cholesterol from your blood vessels. High levels of HDL can lower your risk of stroke or heart attack.

What can I do to help lower my cholesterol?

- Eat healthy foods that are low in saturated fat and cholesterol and high in fiber, such as oatmeal and oat bran. These foods reduce the amount of cholesterol in your body.
- Eat foods high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as fish. Omega-3 fatty acids can protect your heart and lower your risk of heart attack. Many over-the-counter supplements contain omega-3 fatty acids.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Talk to your doctor about increasing your physical activity.

What medications can I take to lower my cholesterol?²

There are several types of prescription medications, like statins, that treat high cholesterol. They work by preventing your body from making too much cholesterol. Statins may lower your risk of stroke and heart problems.

What are the next steps?

Talk to your doctor and get your cholesterol checked. This will help your doctor decide whether you should take cholesterol-lowering medication. If you have diabetes or heart disease, you should check your cholesterol at least once a year.

Here are some questions to ask your doctor:

- How can I measure my LDL cholesterol level?
- Should I take medication to lower my cholesterol?
- Which medication is right for me?
- What do I need to know about statins?

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

heart.org/en/health-topics/cholesterol/about-cholesterol

U.S. Food and Drug Administration Controlling Cholesterol with Statins

fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/controlling-cholesterol-statins

¹National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute website. *High Blood Cholesterol*. nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/hbc/. Accessed April 14, 2017.

²Stone, NJ, Robinson J, Lichtenstein AH, et al. 2013 ACC/AHA Guideline on the Treatment of Blood Cholesterol to Reduce Atherosclerotic Cardiovascular Risk in Adults: A Report of the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association Task Force on Practice Guidelines. *J Am Coll Cardiol*. 2013;doi:10.1016/j.jacc. 2013.11.002.

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