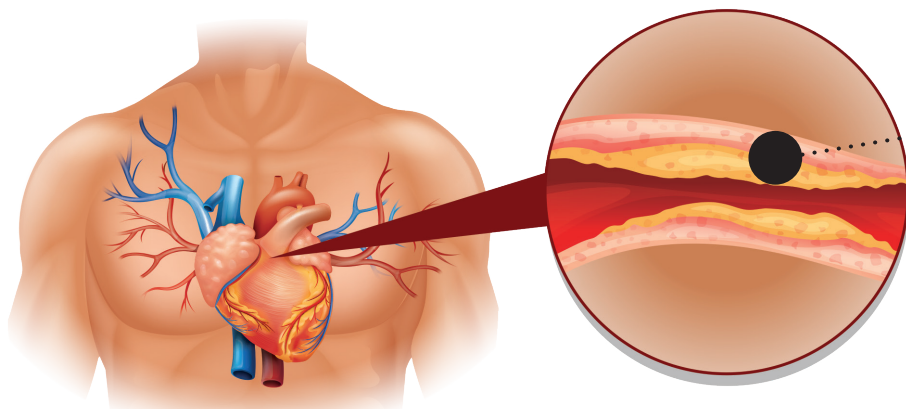


Slash your cholesterol levels



Build up of cholesterol partially blocking blood flow through the artery.

Many people don't really know what cholesterol is, or why it matters for your health.

If your cholesterol levels are too high, you are at an increased risk of heart attack and stroke. This is because too much "bad" LDL cholesterol causes a hard buildup inside your arteries known as plaque. If this buildup breaks loose, it can block an artery to your brain or your heart.

The good news is there are a number of ways to help lower your cholesterol to a healthy level. Your doctor can help you decide what you need. Medicines can help, but there are also natural ways you can slash your cholesterol. They include:

- **Don't eat trans fats.** *Trans* fats are listed on food labels and are known to raise "bad" LDL cholesterol levels. They are found in processed foods such as doughnuts, cookies, biscuits, pies, crackers and margarines. Be sure to check the Nutrition Facts panel for *trans* fats and avoid them whenever possible.

- **Cut back on saturated fats.** These are found in meat and dairy products. They are okay to eat in small amounts. The American Heart Association recommends up to 6 percent of your daily calories be from saturated fat.
- **Eat "good" fats.** Some fats are good for your cholesterol. They include monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. These are found in plant foods and oils such as canola, olive, safflower and grapeseed oils. Avocado, seeds and nuts are also great sources. Fatty fish, such as salmon, also include heart-healthy fats known as omega-3s.
- **Eat colorful fruits and vegetables.** Brightly colored berries, dark green spinach, orange sweet potatoes and more: colors are good for lowering cholesterol! Eat plenty of bright produce for a boost in cholesterol-lowering nutrients.
- **Cut back on sugar and refined grains.** Sweets, white bread, and anything that contains added sugar should be limited. These foods don't help your heart or your overall health.

WHEN TO CHECK YOUR CHOLESTEROL

Your cholesterol can be checked with a simple blood test. High cholesterol has no symptoms, so you won't know you have it unless you get checked. The American Heart Association says adults age 20 and older should have their cholesterol checked every four to six years. Some people may need it checked more often. See your doctor for regular checkups to discuss your cholesterol and other heart disease risk factors.

Sources: American Heart Association; Harvard Medical School