



Cholesterol

"Good" and "Bad"

LDL cholesterol (low-density lipoproteins) is called "bad" cholesterol, because elevated levels of LDL cholesterol are associated with an increased risk of coronary [heart disease](#). LDL lipoprotein deposits cholesterol on the artery walls, causing the formation of a hard, thick substance called cholesterol plaque. Over time, cholesterol plaque causes thickening of the artery walls and narrowing of the arteries, a process called [atherosclerosis](#).

HDL cholesterol (high-density lipoproteins) is called the "good cholesterol" because HDL cholesterol particles prevent atherosclerosis by extracting cholesterol from the artery walls and disposing of them through the liver. Thus, high levels of LDL cholesterol and low levels of HDL cholesterol (high LDL/HDL ratios) are risk factors for atherosclerosis, while low levels of LDL cholesterol and high level of HDL cholesterol (low LDL/HDL ratios) are desirable.

Total cholesterol is the sum of LDL (low density) cholesterol, HDL (high density) cholesterol, VLDL (very low density) cholesterol, and IDL (intermediate density) cholesterol.

Lowering LDL cholesterol is currently one of the primary public health initiatives preventing atherosclerosis and heart attacks. The benefits of lowering LDL cholesterol include:

- reducing or stopping the formation of new cholesterol plaques on the artery walls
- reducing existing cholesterol plaques on the artery walls and opening the arteries
- preventing the rupture of cholesterol plaques, which initiates blood clot formation and blocks blood vessels
- decreasing the risk of heart attacks
- decreasing the risk of strokes

The same measures that decrease narrowing in coronary arteries also may benefit the carotid and cerebral arteries (arteries that deliver blood to the brain).

Healthcare providers encourage people to limit their intake of fatty foods and eat more low-fat foods such as whole grains, vegetables, fruits, pastas, dried peas, beans and lentils. People who get the majority of their calories from low-fat foods have a lower risk of developing heart disease, and possibly some cancers. And they are less likely to be overweight.

If you haven't had your Cholesterol tested recently, consider doing so. To learn more about cholesterol and how it affects your health, talk to your healthcare provider.