

What Do My Cholesterol Levels Mean?

High blood cholesterol signals a higher risk of heart attack and stroke. That's why it's important to have your cholesterol levels checked regularly and discuss them with your doctor. A "lipoprotein profile" is a test to find out your blood cholesterol numbers. It gives information about total cholesterol, LDL ("bad") cholesterol and HDL ("good") cholesterol, as well as triglycerides (blood fats).

Taking a small blood sample from a finger is one common way that cholesterol levels can be measured.



What should my total cholesterol level be?

Total Blood Cholesterol Levels:

Less than 200 mg/dL = Desirable (lower risk)
200 to 239 mg/dL = Borderline high (higher risk)

240 mg/dL and above = High blood cholesterol (more than twice the risk as desirable level)

What should my HDL cholesterol level be?

HDL stands for high-density lipoprotein. HDL is "good" cholesterol because it seems to lower your risk of heart attack and stroke. That means that — unlike other cholesterol levels — the higher your HDL cholesterol, the better. You can raise your HDL cholesterol by quitting smoking, losing excess weight and being more active.

HDL Cholesterol Levels:

Less than 40 mg/dL for men = Low HDL (higher risk)
Less than 50 mg/dL for women = Low HDL (higher risk)
40 to 59 mg/dL = The higher, the better
60 mg/dL and above = High HDL (lower risk)

LDL stands for low-density lipoprotein. This is the main carrier of harmful cholesterol in your blood. A high level of LDL cholesterol means there's a higher risk of heart disease and stroke.

LDL Cholesterol Levels:

Less than 70 mg/dL = Optional goal if you're at very high risk of a heart attack or death from heart attack.
Less than 100 mg/dL = Optimal for people with heart disease or diabetes
100 to 129 mg/dL = Near or above optimal
130 to 159 mg/dL = Borderline high
160 to 189 mg/dL = High
190 mg/dL and above = Very High

What should my triglyceride level be?

Triglycerides are the most common type of fat in your body. They're also a major energy source. They come from food, and your body also makes them. As people get older, gain excess weight or both, their triglyceride and cholesterol levels tend to rise. Many people who have heart disease or diabetes have high fasting triglyceride levels. Some studies have shown that people with above-normal fasting triglyceride levels (150 mg/dL or higher) have a higher risk of heart disease and stroke.

Triglyceride Levels:

- Less than 150 mg/dL = Normal
- 150 to 199 mg/dL = Borderline High
- 200 to 499 mg/dL = High
- 500 mg/dL and above = Very High

My Cholesterol and Triglyceride Levels

Use the chart below to keep track of your cholesterol and triglyceride levels each time you have a test. Make sure you discuss these numbers with your doctor.

	My Goal	1st Visit	2nd Visit	3rd Visit
Total blood cholesterol level	_____	_____	_____	_____
HDL-cholesterol level	_____	_____	_____	_____
LDL-cholesterol level	_____	_____	_____	_____
Triglyceride level	_____	_____	_____	_____

How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit americanheart.org to learn more about heart disease.

3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit StrokeAssociation.org.

We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.

Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

What about other fats? _____

How often should I have my levels checked? _____