

High Cholesterol

Too much cholesterol can clog your blood vessels and is a major cause of heart disease.

To help lower your cholesterol and keep it at a healthy level, eat the right foods, maintain a healthy weight, and be physically active. (For more information, go to the sections "[Eating Right](#)" and "[Keeping Active](#).") Your doctor or nurse may suggest you take medicine to lower your cholesterol.

You should start having your cholesterol checked if:

- You are a man 35 or older.
- You are a woman 45 or older.
- You are a man between the ages of 20 and 35 or a woman between the ages of 20 and 45, and you have other risk factors for heart disease. Other risk factors are tobacco use, diabetes, high blood pressure, or a family history of heart disease.

Most experts recommend checking your cholesterol every 5 years. Your doctor or nurse may suggest you have it checked more often, especially if your cholesterol is too high.

Eating Right

Eating the right foods and the right amounts can help you live a longer, healthier life. Many illnesses and conditions—such as heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes—can be prevented or controlled by eating right. A healthy diet also provides the vitamins and minerals you need.

It is never too late to start eating right. Here are some helpful tips.

Eat a variety of foods, including:

- Vegetables, especially dark-green leafy and deep-yellow vegetables, such as spinach or carrots.
- Fruits, such as melons, berries, and citrus fruits, or juices, such as orange or grapefruit.
- Meat, poultry, eggs, fish, and dried beans (for example, navy, kidney, or black), especially products low in fat, such as lean meat and poultry prepared without skin.

- Dairy products, such as milk, yogurt, and cheese, especially low-fat or fat-free dairy products.
- Grains, especially whole grains, and legumes, such as lima beans or green peas.

Limit calories and saturated fat.

Foods high in saturated fats are high in calories, so they can cause weight gain. They also increase your cholesterol levels. Try to limit:

- High-fat dairy products such as ice cream, butter, cheese, cream, and whole milk.
- Meats high in fat.
- Palm and coconut oils and lard.

Unsaturated fats do not raise cholesterol levels. Foods with unsaturated fat include vegetable oils, fish, avocados, and many nuts.

Watch portion sizes.

Don't choose "super" or other oversized portions. Be aware of how much you eat.

Keeping Active

Physical activity can help prevent:

- Heart disease.
- Obesity.
- High blood pressure.
- Type 2 diabetes.
- Osteoporosis (thinning bones).
- Mental health problems such as depression.

Physical activity helps you feel better overall.

What to Do

All kinds of physical activity will help you stay healthy, whether it is moderate or vigorous. It's a good idea to aim for at least moderate activity—such as brisk walking, raking leaves, house cleaning, or

playing with children—for 20 to 30 minutes most days of the week. Generally, the more active you are, the healthier you will become.

How to Get Started and Keep at It

If you have not been active, start slowly.

Choose something that fits into your daily life.

Choose an activity you like, or try a new one. Activities such as dancing, swimming, or biking can be fun.

Ask a friend to exercise with you, or join a group.

Make time in your day for physical activity.

If the weather is bad, try an exercise show on TV, watch an exercise tape, walk in the mall, or work around the house.

Reference Source: “The Pocket Guide to Good Health for Adults.” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality: May 2003.