

Risk Factors

You're considered to be at a high risk of heart disease if you have:

- A previous heart attack or stroke
- Artery blockages in your neck (carotid artery disease)
- Artery blockages in your arms or legs (peripheral artery disease)

In addition, two or more of the following might also place you in the very high risk group: Smoking; High blood pressure; Low HDL cholesterol; Diabetes; Family history of heart disease; Age older than 45 (male) or 55 (woman); Elevated lipoprotein (a), another type of fat (lipid) in your blood.

High cholesterol has no symptoms, but your genetic makeup - reflected in family history of high cholesterol or heart disease - might make you more prone to high cholesterol, even if you eat right and exercise. You should have a baseline cholesterol test at age 20 and follow-up tests once every five (5) years or as recommended by your doctor. Early detection allows you to take action before it's too late

Lifestyle Changes

If your LDL cholesterol is too high, your doctor will probably suggest lifestyle changes. These changes include:

- Quitting Smoking
- Eating more soluble fibre, found in oatmeal beans, fruit & vegetables
- Eating less fat and cholesterol from meat and dairy products
- Losing weight
- Exercising at least 30 minutes a day, 5 day a week

Being overweight and inactive tends to increase your LDL and lower your HDL cholesterol. Exercise and weight loss can help reverse this trend. This is especially important for people who have large waist measurements - more than 40 inches (101.6 cm) for men and more than 35 inches (88.9 cm) for women - because people with this body shape are more likely to develop heart disease.

CHOLESTEROL LEVELS

What numbers should you aim for?

Figuring out the best cholesterol levels to aim for can be confusing. here's some help setting your cholesterol number targets.

It's important to keep your cholesterol levels within healthy limits. And if you have other risk factors for developing heart disease, you need to be even more careful - especially with your low-density lipoprotein (LDL), or "bad," cholesterol level.

INTERPRETING YOUR CHOLESTEROL NUMBERS

Cholesterol levels are measured in milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per deciliter (dL) of blood in the United States and some other countries. Canada and most European countries measure cholesterol in millimoles (mmol) per liter (L) of blood. Consider these general guidelines when you get your cholesterol test (lipid panel or lipid profile) results back to see if your cholesterol falls in an ideal range.

TOTAL CHOLESTEROL

US	UK	
Below 200 mg/dL	Below 5.2 mmol/L	Desirable
200-239 mg/dL	5.2-6.2 mmol/L	Borderline High
240 mg/dL and above	Above 6.2 mmol/L	High

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Types of Cholesterol

A blood test to check cholesterol levels — called a lipid panel or lipid profile — typically reports:

- Total cholesterol
- HDL cholesterol
- LDL cholesterol
- Triglycerides, a type of fat often increased by sweets and alcohol

For the most accurate measurements, don't eat or drink anything (other than water) for nine to 12 hours before the blood sample is taken.

LDL (Bad) Cholesterol

Because LDL cholesterol is a major risk factor for Heart Disease, it's the main focus of cholesterol-lowering treatment. Your target LDL number can vary, depending on your underlying risk of heart disease. When too much LDL (bad) cholesterol circulates in the blood, it can slowly build up in the inner walls of the arteries that feed the heart and brain. Together with other substances, it can form plaque, a thick, hard deposit that can narrow the arteries and make them less flexible. This condition is known as atherosclerosis. If a clot forms and blocks a narrowed artery, heart attack or stroke can result.

LDL CHOLESTEROL

US	UK	
Below 70 mg/dL	Below 1.8 mmol/L	Ideal for people at very high risk of heart disease
Below 100 mg/dL	Below 2.6 mmol/L	Ideal for people at high risk of heart disease
100-129 mg/dL	2.6-3.3 mmol/L	Near Ideal
130-159 mg/dL	3.4-4.1 mmol/L	Borderline High
160-189 mg/dL	4.1-4.9 mmol/L	High
190 mg/dL and above	Above 4.9 mmol/L	Very High

HDL (Good) Cholesterol

Higher LDL cholesterol levels mean higher risk. High-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol is known as "good" cholesterol because it helps prevent arteries from becoming clogged. Higher HDL cholesterol levels generally mean lower risk.

HDL CHOLESTEROL

US	UK	
Below 40 mg/dL (men)	Below 1 mmol/L (men)	Poor
Below 50 mg/dL (women)	Below 1.3 mmol/L (women)	Poor
50-59 mg/dL	1.3-1.5 mmol/L	Better
60 mg/dL and above	Above 1.5 mmol/L	Best

Triglycerides

Triglyceride is a form of fat made in the body. Elevated triglycerides can be due to overweight/obesity, physical inactivity, cigarette smoking, excess alcohol consumption and a diet very high in carbohydrates (60% of total calories or more). People with high triglycerides often have a high total cholesterol level, including a high LDL (bad) level and a low HDL (good) level. Many people with heart disease and/or diabetes also have high triglyceride levels.

TRIGLYCERIDES

US	UK	
Below 150 mg/dL	Below 1.7 mmol/L	Desirable
150-199 mg/dL	1.7-2.2 mmol/L	Borderline High
200-400 mg/dL	2.3-5.6 mmol/L	High
500 mg/dL and above	Above 5.6 mmol/L	Very High