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# Understanding cholesterol

Chances are, your provider checks your cholesterol levels regularly. These numbers help determine possible risks for heart disease and stroke. So it's no surprise that managing those cholesterol levels can help you lead a healthy lifestyle.

## The good and the bad

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance present in every cell in the body, and your body needs it to function properly. When you get your cholesterol checked, you'll likely see it recorded in three numbers – HDL, LDL and triglycerides. Here's a breakdown:

- **HDL (high-density lipoprotein)** is often referred to as "good" cholesterol. HDL cholesterol carries some LDL cholesterol away from the bloodstream. A healthy HDL level may lower your risk for a heart attack and stroke.
- **LDL (low-density lipoprotein)** is often referred to as "bad" cholesterol. LDL cholesterol tends to form fatty deposits that cling to the walls of the arteries that supply blood to the heart and brain. The resulting clogging increases your risk for a heart attack and stroke.
- **Triglycerides (blood fats)** are a common fat in our bodies and an energy source. If you have a high level, plus a low HDL or high LDL, you may be at risk for atherosclerosis ("hardening of the arteries"). This is a buildup of fatty deposits in the walls of the arteries, which can increase your risk of heart disease and stroke.



## How to take control

If your numbers are outside the healthy range, work with your provider to start healthier habits. Depending on your numbers, your doctor may recommend medication combined with lifestyle tips. Here are a few to consider:

- Keep a healthy weight.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet.
- Limit sodium (salt) intake.
- Get regular physical activity.\*
- Limit alcohol.
- Quit tobacco.

Understanding your cholesterol levels and keeping them at a healthy range can help you live a healthy life.

\*If you're pregnant, have been physically inactive or have a health condition such as heart disease, diabetes or arthritis, check with your doctor before starting an exercise program or increasing your activity level. He or she can tell you what types and amounts of activities are safe for you.