



What is cholesterol and where does it come from?

Cholesterol is a waxy substance that comes from two sources: your body and food. Your body, and especially your liver, makes all the cholesterol you need and circulates it through the blood. But cholesterol is also found in foods from animal sources, such as meat, poultry and full-fat dairy products. Your liver produces more cholesterol when you eat a diet high in saturated and *trans* fats.

Excess cholesterol can form plaque between layers of artery walls, making it harder for your heart to circulate blood. Plaque can break open and cause blood clots. If a clot blocks an artery that feeds the brain, it causes a [stroke](#). If it blocks an artery that feeds the heart, it causes a [heart attack](#) [View an animation of cholesterol](#)

There are two types of cholesterol: "good" and "bad." Too much of one type — or not enough of another — can put you at risk for coronary heart disease, heart attack or stroke. It's important to know the levels of cholesterol in your blood so that you and your doctor can determine the best strategy to lower your risk.

Prevention

Too much cholesterol in the blood can lead to cardiovascular disease. Cardiovascular disease is the No. 1 cause of death in the United States. Over 2,100 Americans die of cardiovascular disease each day, an average of one death every 40 seconds.

The good news is, you can lower your cholesterol and reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Working with your doctor is the key

Work with your doctor to determine your risk and the best approach to manage it. In all cases, lifestyle changes are important to reduce your risk for heart attack and stroke. In some cases, cholesterol-lowering statin medicines may also provide benefit.

Learn how to make diet and lifestyle changes easy and lasting. Also make sure you understand instructions for taking medication because it won't work if you don't take it as directed.

[Lifestyle Changes](#)

Your diet, weight, physical activity and exposure to tobacco smoke all affect your cholesterol level.

[Know Your Fats](#)

Knowing which fats raise LDL cholesterol and which ones don't is the first step in lowering your risk of heart disease.

[Cooking for Lower Cholesterol](#)

A heart-healthy eating plan can help you manage your blood cholesterol level.

[Understand Drug Therapy Options](#)

For some people, lifestyle changes alone aren't enough to reach healthy cholesterol levels. Your doctor may prescribe medication.

[Avoid Common Misconceptions](#)

We have created a list of the common misconceptions, along with the true story, about cholesterol.