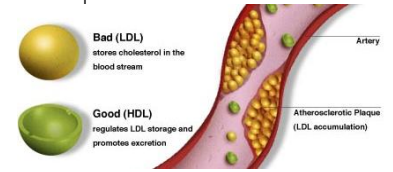


## WHAT IS CHOLESTEROL?



### What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol, a waxy substance produced by the liver and found in certain foods, is needed to make vitamin D and some hormones, build cell walls, and create bile salts that help you digest fat.

Your liver is capable of producing about 1,000 milligrams of cholesterol a day – enough cholesterol so that even if you never touched another cheese fry, we'd be okay. So many foods contain cholesterol so it is very difficult to avoid consuming cholesterol-containing foods entirely. As with most things, too much of anything is NO GOOD! Too much cholesterol in the body can lead to serious problems like heart disease. Many factors can contribute to high cholesterol, but the good news is there are things you can do to control them.

### Why Do People Worry About High Cholesterol?

Too much cholesterol can be dangerous to your health. When LDL cholesterol levels are high, cholesterol is deposited on the walls of arteries to form a hard substance called **plaque**. Over time, plaque causes the arteries to become narrower, decreasing blood flow and causing a condition called **atherosclerosis** (pronounced: ah-thuh-ro-skluh-ro-sis), or hardening of the arteries. This condition is called **coronary artery disease**, which puts a person at risk for having a heart attack. When atherosclerosis affects the blood vessels that supply the brain, the condition is called **cerebral vascular disease**, which puts a person at risk of having a stroke.

Atherosclerosis may also block blood flow to other vital organs, including the kidneys and intestines. This is why it's so important to start paying attention to cholesterol levels as a teen — you can delay or prevent serious health problems in the future.



### What Causes High LDL Cholesterol Levels?

Some of the factors that can lead to high cholesterol are:

- **Overweight** — Excess weight has been linked with high cholesterol levels.
- **Heredity** — If cholesterol problems run in your family, you are at a higher risk for having problems.
- **Diet** — Remember the saying "you are what you eat"? Avoid foods that are high in cholesterol, saturated fat, and trans fat, all of which increase cholesterol levels and your risk of developing heart disease.
- **Age** — The risk of high LDL increases as you get older.
- **Physical activity** tends to increase HDL levels, which reduces your chance of developing heart disease.



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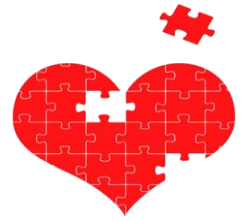
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### What Can I Do to Lower My Cholesterol?

Some people who have high cholesterol levels need to be on medications as part of their treatment to lower it. To see if you have high cholesterol, talk to your doctor, who can test your cholesterol levels by drawing a sample of your blood. You can't change your genes but there are things you can do now to decrease your risk for heart disease later.

Regular aerobic exercise — biking, walking, and swimming — strengthens your heart, lowers cholesterol, and helps you to lose excess weight. If you smoke, quitting can help decrease your risk of heart disease.



Although not all the factors contributing to heart disease and high cholesterol can be controlled, many can. Start taking care of your body now and it will thank you in the future.