

Cholesterol Fact Sheet

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a soft, waxy fat (lipid) in the blood stream that is found in all of your body's cells. Your body naturally makes all the cholesterol it needs to form cell membranes, hormones, and vitamin D. Some foods such as egg yolks, liver, and fried foods contain cholesterol and saturated fats that increase cholesterol levels.

What is LDL cholesterol?

LDL cholesterol is often called the "bad" cholesterol because it can clog arteries. LDL carries cholesterol into the blood stream and to your tissues where your body stores it. LDL cholesterol can cause plaque build-up, which can clog arteries. In time, the plaque can cause the arteries to narrow or block completely, leading to a stroke or heart attack.

What is HDL cholesterol?

HDL carries cholesterol away from the tissues to the liver, where it is filtered out of the body. High levels

of HDL, also called "good" cholesterol, seem to protect against stroke and heart disease, so higher numbers are better. HDL less than 40 mg/dL is low, and is a risk factor for heart disease. HDL levels of 60 mg/dL or more can help lower your risk.

What do my cholesterol levels mean?

According to National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), for people over age 18, total cholesterol of more than 200mg/dL is considered high. If your total cholesterol is more than 200mg/dL or your HDL is less than 40mg/dL, your risk of stroke and heart disease could increase.

Cholesterol levels are measured in milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per deciliter (dL) of blood. If you have had a previous stroke or heart attack, your cholesterol levels may need to be less than indicated below. Ask your doctor about your cholesterol levels.

Total Blood Cholesterol Levels
Desirable: Under 200 mg/dL
Borderline High: 200-239 mg/dL
High: 240 mg/dL and above
LDL cholesterol levels
Optimal: Under 100 mg/dL
Near Optimal/Above Optimal: 100-129 mg/dL
Borderline High: 130-159 mg/dL
High: 160-189 mg/dL
Very High: 190 mg/dL

For more information:

National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute
Cholesterol Education Project
1-800-575-WELL (575-9355)
www.nhlbi.nih.gov/chd

National Stroke Association
1-800-787-6537
(STROKES)
www.stroke.org

Note: This fact sheet is compiled from general, publicly available information and should not be considered recommended treatment for any particular individual. You should consult your provider about any personal medical concerns.