

Cholesterol

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Cholesterol, both “good” and “bad”, is manufactured by the liver from the fatty foods that we eat, and is vital for the normal functioning of the body. “Good cholesterol” (High density lipoprotein) is thought to prevent arterial disease. It takes cholesterol away from the cells and back to the liver, where it is either broken down or is passed from the body as a waste product. “Bad cholesterol” (Low density lipoprotein) is thought to increase arterial disease. It carries cholesterol from the liver to the cells and can cause a harmful build-up if there is too much for the cells to use.

Medical research shows that having high cholesterol levels in your blood is one of many factors, including smoking, being overweight and lack of exercise, that increase the risk of heart attacks or strokes. Consequently, lowering blood cholesterol levels will help reduce these risks but there are other factors to take into consideration. For example, your “safe” cholesterol levels will be influenced by whether or not:

- you have diabetes
- you have had heart problems
- you have had a stroke

If you have any concerns or questions, please consult your doctor in the first instance.

Medication

Although lifestyle changes can influence your cholesterol levels, your doctor may recommend medication to help, particularly if you have had a heart attack, stroke or diabetes. It is very important to use any such medication exactly as instructed. However, if you experience any side effects from your medication, you should **immediately** consult your doctor. In such a circumstance, different medication may be prescribed. Please note that even if prescribed medication, it is still important to adopt lifestyle changes making sure, where appropriate, to reduce the risk of heart attack or stroke.

Advice

- Please note that even if you are otherwise healthy, it is still desirable to have your cholesterol levels checked.
- Eat a healthy balanced diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables (5 portions per day are recommended).
- Minimise consumption of foods which are high in fat (especially saturated, animal fats).
- Include oily fish such as salmon, mackerel or herring in your diet as there is good evidence to show that this helps to protect the heart.
- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Get as much exercise as much as possible. This will help with weight loss, will make you feel better and reduce your chances of developing diabetes.
- Don't exceed the recommended alcohol guidelines of 14 units per week for women and 21 units per week for men.
- Stop smoking.
- Make sure that the body is properly hydrated by drinking between 6-8 glasses of water a day.