



Cholesterol isn't just a concern for adults.

You may have heard adults say that they were “watching their cholesterol.” Some kids and teens need to watch their cholesterol, too. If your cholesterol level is high, over time it can damage your heart. If you choose healthy foods, get enough physical activity, and don't smoke, you'll help to keep your cholesterol low and your heart strong. You'll feel the difference now, and you'll stay healthy later.

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a waxy fat that your body makes. Too much cholesterol can build up inside the arteries of the heart making

it difficult for blood to flow. If cholesterol blocks your arteries, you could have a heart attack.

Actually, there are two main kinds of cholesterol: Good cholesterol and bad cholesterol.

1. *Good cholesterol, or high-density lipoproteins (HDL)*, pick up the bad cholesterol in your blood and take it to the liver where it's removed from the body. HDL cholesterol lowers the risk of heart disease and stroke. Exercise increases the amount of HDL.
2. *Bad cholesterol, or low-density lipoproteins (LDL)*, pick up cholesterol from the liver and fatty foods and deliver it to the cells. When your body has more cholesterol than it can handle, the extra cholesterol sticks to your artery walls. Too much LDL cholesterol will end up blocking the arteries, making it hard for the blood to flow normally. This can eventually lead to heart disease. But there are things you can do. Getting enough exercise and healthy eating lower the amount of LDL (bad cholesterol).

How do I make sure my bad cholesterol is low?

1. *Cut down on fat.* Many of our foods are loaded with fat. Changing to lower fat foods can be an easy way to help lower your bad cholesterol.
 - Choose nonfat or low-fat foods and milk. Choose foods that have little or no saturated fat. Skip fried food.
 - Read food labels. Avoid food with trans fat (hydrogenated oils).

- Fill up on whole grains, lean protein, and fruits and vegetables. (Aim for 5–9 servings of fruits and vegetables a day.)
2. *Get fit.* Try to get at least 60 minutes of exercise a day. Aerobic exercise (like walking, running, swimming, roller blading, or basketball) is the best way to keep your heart in great shape. Also:
 - Limit screen time (TV, computers, and video games) to 1–2 hours a day. Swap one hour of TV time for a fun new activity.
 - Join a sports team at school or at the community center.
 3. *Don't use tobacco.* Cigarettes, cigars, and chewing tobacco increase your chances of heart disease by lowering your good cholesterol.
 - Call your doctor or nurse practitioner for help quitting.
 - The California Smokers' Helpline is a free service made for teens to help you kick the habit. Call 1-800-NO-BUTTS to get help.
 - Visit “Quit Smoking” at kp.org/quitsmoking

Who should be tested (screened) for cholesterol?

Kids and teens whose parents or grandparents have a family history of early heart disease should be tested for cholesterol. Think about getting a cholesterol test if:

- Your parent or grandparent had a heart attack or stroke before the age of 55 years for men and 65 years for women.

- Your mom or dad has high cholesterol (240 mg/dl or higher).

How do I get my cholesterol tested?

Your doctor or other medical professional can order a simple blood test. This test usually reports results as “Total Cholesterol,” but it often gives more information about HDL (or “good” cholesterol) and LDL (or “bad cholesterol”) scores. Basically, you want low scores for both total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol and higher numbers for HDL cholesterol.

Here is a guide for understanding your total cholesterol score:

Risk	Total Cholesterol Score
Low	Under 170 mg/dl
Borderline	Between 170-199 mg/dl
High	200 mg/dl or higher

What should I do if I have high cholesterol?

There are many ways to begin to lower your cholesterol. The most important changes you can make are eating healthy and being active. This way, not only will you feel and look better, but you’ll be lowering your cholesterol and making your heart strong.

Healthy eating

- Eat fewer fatty foods:

Instead of:	Try:
cookies	graham crackers
cole slaw	raw vegetables
fried chicken	grilled chicken
whole milk	low-fat or nonfat milk
french fries	baked potato
doughnuts	bagels
ice cream	low-fat frozen yogurt

- Eat more fish. Most fish has a special kind of fat that helps lower cholesterol.
- Eat more foods high in fiber. Try eating 5–9 servings of fruits and vegetables a day. One serving is equal to a piece of fruit or 1/2 to 1 cup of vegetables.
- Limit soda, sports drinks, juice and sweetened drinks. One can of soda is equal to drinking a candy bar!
- Keep healthy snacks for between classes or after school. Pretzels, bagels, air-popped popcorn, and baby carrots are easy to keep in your backpack.
- Choose low-fat foods more often. Low-fat foods contain 3 grams or less per serving. Check out the label for fat content and serving sizes.
- Talk to your family about choosing low-fat and low-cholesterol meals.

Activity and exercise

- Aim for at least 60 minutes of activity each day. Choose exercise that is fun for you and make it part of your routine.
- Limit screen time (TV, computers and video games) to 1–2 hours a day.

Instead of:	Try:
the elevator	the stairs
driving to school	walking or biking
hanging with friends	go on a walk with your friends or play sports
sitting around on rainy days	jumping rope, the hula-hoop, or dancing

What if I like fast food?

All fast food isn’t bad. Watching what you eat and how often you eat it can help reduce the fat and cholesterol in your fast-food meals.

- Order food without cheese, sour cream, or mayonnaise (catsup and mustard are okay).
- Avoid deep-fried foods like fries, chips, onion rings, tacos, and fried meats (chicken, fish).
- Drink water or low-fat milk instead of soda.
- Don’t supersize! When serving sizes are larger, share your meal with a friend or order the smaller sizes.
- Order the sandwich and hold the fries. Try a side salad instead.
- Try a veggie burger.

More resources

Books

- *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook* has sections on “How to Reduce Your Cholesterol” and “15 Simple Ways to Reduce Fat.” Call 1-800-464-4000 for your own copy.
- *Healthy Eating for Weight Management* (Nutrition and Fitness for Teens), Mary Turck.
- *Food and You: A Guide to Healthy Eating Habits for Teens*, Marjoijin Bijlefeld and Sharon Zoumaris.
- *The Right Moves to Getting Fit and Feeling Great*, Tina Schwager and Michele Schuenger, Free Spirit publishing, 1998.

Web sites

- Kaiser Permanente: kp.org/healthyliving
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute: nhlbi.nih.gov
- California Project Lean: cprojectlean.org

Or visit your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center for classes, videos, and other information.

This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.