

## What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is fat found in many foods that come from animals, such as beef, pork, milk, and eggs. Your liver also makes cholesterol. Your body needs some cholesterol to stay healthy. But too much can block your arteries, the blood vessels that lead to your heart. That's why adults with high cholesterol are more likely to have heart attacks.

Doctors recommend that adults lower their cholesterol levels to protect themselves from heart disease. Two ways you can do this are to follow a healthy eating plan and get plenty of physical activity.

## What do the terms HDL and LDL mean?

Your blood carries cholesterol in different packages. These cholesterol packages include HDL and LDL.

- HDL stands for high-density lipoprotein. This package is sometimes called good cholesterol because it helps your body get rid of extra cholesterol and lowers your risk for heart disease.
- LDL stands for low-density lipoprotein. This package is sometimes called bad cholesterol because it builds up in the walls of blood vessels. This can lead to a higher risk for heart disease.

Your total cholesterol is the amount of HDL and LDL you have in your bloodstream. Total cholesterol is number people are most familiar with.

## What is a cholesterol test?

A cholesterol test measures the amount of total cholesterol in your blood. The test compares the total amount to the amount of HDL. This comparison is called a ratio. Your ratio can help find out if you're at risk for heart disease.

## What do the numbers mean?

The following numbers and ratios are for people who have never had a heart problem. If you have heart disease, ask your doctor what numbers you should aim for.

If your total cholesterol is:

- **Over 240 and your ratio is over 6.0** -- You have an increased risk for future heart disease.
- **200 and your ratio is 4.5** -- Your risk for future heart disease is average.
- **Under 200 and your ratio is under 4.0** -- You have a lowered risk of getting heart disease in the future.

It's important to remember that your cholesterol level is only part of the information you and your doctor need

to help protect you from future heart problems.

Other information that can help determine if you're at risk for heart disease includes:

- Your blood pressure.
- If you smoke or have diabetes.
- Your family history. Having an immediate family member who developed heart disease at a very early age increases your risk.
- Your age and gender.

## What can I do to stay healthy?

The following 3 things will help you stay healthy and lower your risk of heart disease:

- If you smoke, stop.
- Eat healthy foods. Make sure to eat foods that are low in fat and high in fiber, such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Be physically active. The more active you are, the healthier you'll be and the better you'll feel.

If you smoke and need help stopping, talk to your doctor. Your doctor can also give you information on how to choose healthier foods and add more physical activity to your daily life.

## Who should have a cholesterol test?

The most important factors in estimating overall risk are your age and having other major risk factors. We consider both of these things in our recommendations for cholesterol testing.

### Men ages 35-79 and women ages 45-79

We recommend cholesterol testing every 5 years for people without risk factors.

### Men and women age 79 and older

Kaiser Permanente recommends routine cholesterol testing for people over 79 if they have a condition that increases their risk for heart disease, such as diabetes. If you don't have a condition that increases your risk, talk to your doctor about whether continued screening is right for you.

## Resources: Where can I get more information?

- If you have questions or need more information about your medicine, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.
- The **Kaiser Permanente Resource Line** can provide information on a variety of health topics and community resources. Call weekdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. toll-free 1-800-992-2279.
- Visit the Health and Wellness Resources section on the **Kaiser Permanente website** at [kp.org/wa](http://kp.org/wa) for information on health topics, including eating a healthy diet and lowering cholesterol.

## Cholesterol Testing

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- Who should have a cholesterol test?

Coverage may vary by plan. For benefits refer to your coverage agreement or contact Member Services at 1-888-901-4636.