

## Love Your Heart, and Lower Your Cholesterol: Cholesterol and Your Heart

### What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol levels measure the amount of a fat-like substance in your blood. Cholesterol travels through your blood attached to two proteins, HDL and LDL proteins. HDL cholesterol is called good cholesterol because it helps clean up extra cholesterol in your arteries, lowering your chance of a blood clot and heart attack. LDL cholesterol is called bad cholesterol because it travels through your arteries and can stick to them. This reduces blood supply and can cause a heart attack.



To have a healthy cholesterol level, it needs to be lower than 5 mmol/l (millimoles/litre). If you have heart disease or diabetes, you need to have a total cholesterol level lower than 4.5 mmol/l.

### What has good cholesterol and bad cholesterol?

Foods can contain good fats and bad fats that can change your cholesterol levels. Saturated fats, trans fats, and high levels of triglycerides are bad for you. Saturated fats increase your bad cholesterol and your chance of heart disease, and trans fats both raise your bad cholesterol and lower your good cholesterol.

Foods with **saturated fats** and **trans fats** are foods like butter, cream, cheese, fatty meats, cakes, fast food, fried food, and coconut and palm oil.

**Trans fats** are also usually in processed foods and in foods that have 'hydrogenated oils' or 'hydrogenated fats' in their ingredients list. Being overweight, drinking too much, eating sugary foods, and not exercising can also raise your cholesterol.

Unlike saturated fats, different types of fats called **monounsaturated fats** are good because they help lower your LDL and reduce your chance of heart disease. **Polyunsaturated fats** are also good for you because they help your heart keep a healthy rhythm, lower triglycerides, and lower bad cholesterol.

Foods like peanut oil, avocados, and small amounts of unsalted nuts like walnuts and almonds are good for your cholesterol and contain good fat. They can help limit the effects of bad cholesterol and reduce your chance of heart disease.

### How do I monitor my cholesterol?

Your GP can measure your cholesterol when you go in for an appointment. It is very important that they monitor your cholesterol to make sure that your heart is healthy. There are also home test kits for cholesterol levels, but your GP's measurement is more reliable than the cholesterol measurement from a home test kit. It is recommended that you do not use home test.

If you have a problem with cholesterol, doctors will probably suggest a combination of medicine and healthy eating and exercising. To lower your cholesterol, you can:

- Maintain a healthy weight;
- Exercise more;
- Eat fruits and vegetables;
- Eat wholegrain cereals, breads, pasta, and rice;
- Eat less processed, sugary food; and
- Use healthy cooking methods like grilling or baking instead of frying.