

Understanding Cholesterol: Protect Your Heart Before It's Too Late

High cholesterol is one of the most common yet overlooked risk factors for heart disease and stroke. Because it usually causes no symptoms, many people are unaware they have high cholesterol until a serious complication occurs.

What is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a fatty substance found in the blood. Your body needs it to make hormones, vitamin D, and healthy cells. However, excess cholesterol can damage blood vessels and increase the risk of cardiovascular disease.

There are two main types:

LDL (Bad Cholesterol): Deposits cholesterol in artery walls and promotes plaque formation.

HDL (Good Cholesterol): Removes excess cholesterol from the bloodstream and carries it back to the liver.

Why is High Cholesterol Harmful?

Excess LDL cholesterol gradually accumulates in arteries, causing atherosclerosis. As plaques grow, blood vessels become narrower, reducing blood flow to the heart and brain.

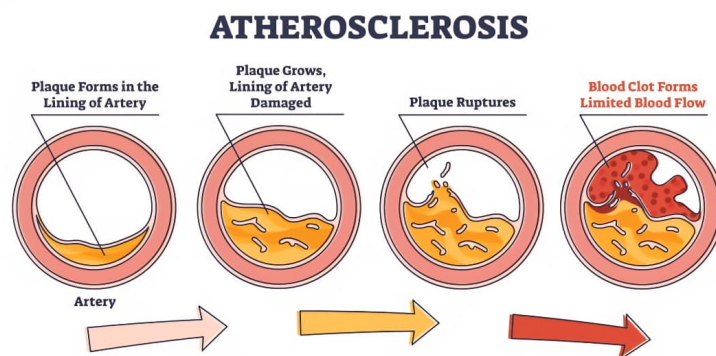


Figure 1: Atherosclerosis and Plaque Formation

A ruptured plaque can cause a blood clot, leading to:

- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Peripheral arterial disease

Who is at Risk?

You may be at increased risk if you have:

- Diabetes

- High blood pressure
- Obesity
- Smoking habit
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Family history of heart disease
- Diet rich in saturated fats and processed foods

How is Cholesterol Checked?

A simple lipid profile blood test measures:

- Total cholesterol
- LDL cholesterol
- HDL cholesterol
- Triglycerides

Regular screening helps identify problems before symptoms develop.

Diet Matters

Healthy eating is one of the most effective ways to lower cholesterol.

Choose More:

- Fruits and vegetables
- Whole grains
- Oats and legumes
- Nuts and seeds
- Fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids



Figure 2: High-Fiber Foods for Heart Health

Limit:

- Fried foods
 - Processed snacks
 - Excess red meat
- Sugary drinks
- Fast foods

Exercise: A Natural Cholesterol-Lowering Tool

Regular physical activity increases HDL ("good") cholesterol and improves overall heart health.

Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week such as:

- Brisk walking
- Cycling
- Swimming
- Jogging

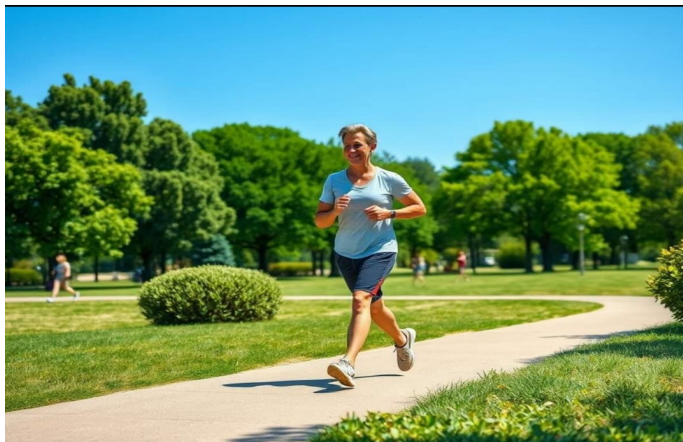


Figure 3: Regular Physical Activity

When Are Medicines Needed?

Lifestyle changes are the first step. However, people with diabetes, heart disease, very high LDL cholesterol, or multiple risk factors may require medications such as statins to reduce cardiovascular risk.

Key Take-Home Messages

- ✓ Check your cholesterol regularly.
- ✓ Eat a heart-healthy diet.
- ✓ Stay physically active.
- ✓ Maintain a healthy weight.

- ✓ Avoid tobacco and excessive alcohol.
- ✓ Follow your doctor's advice regarding treatment.

Conclusion

High cholesterol is a silent threat, but it is largely preventable and treatable. Early detection, healthy lifestyle choices, and timely medical care can significantly reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke and help you live a longer, healthier life.

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Every monday and second and fourth friday