

# Health *capsule*

## Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a soft waxy substance made by our bodies. It is one of the lipids (fats) normally found in the blood and every cell of the body. We often associate cholesterol with health problems. In fact, cholesterol is a vital building block of cell membranes, hormones and vitamin D. Without it, our bodies couldn't function.

Cholesterol is transported in the blood in lipoproteins. Excess cholesterol carried in LDL (low density lipoproteins) is a major risk factor for atherosclerosis, also known as narrowing of the arteries.

In atherosclerosis, a sticky substance called plaque builds up on the insides of arteries (blood vessels that carry blood from the heart to different parts of the body). This build-up slowly clogs the arteries and damages their lining. The major component of plaque is cholesterol. As the arteries narrow and become damaged, the risk of circulation problems, angina, heart attacks and strokes increases.

The first type, LDL cholesterol, is known as “bad” cholesterol. While our bodies need normal amounts of LDL cholesterol for cell growth and repair, high levels of LDL cholesterol are responsible for the buildup of plaque in the arteries.

The second, HDL cholesterol, is known as “good” cholesterol because it helps move “bad” cholesterol out of the cells that line the arteries to the bloodstream and back to the liver for excretion.

Almost 40% of Canadian adults are classified as having high blood cholesterol levels.

In most cases, high cholesterol does not produce symptoms. The only way to know if you have high cholesterol levels is to have your blood tested. Not sure if you should be concerned about your cholesterol levels? Ask your doctor.

Canadian guidelines recommend having your cholesterol tested if you:

- are male and over 40 years of age;
- are female and over 50 years of age and/or post-menopausal;
- have heart disease, diabetes or high blood pressure;
- have a waist measurement greater than 102 cm (40 inches) for men or 88 cm (35 inches) for women;
- smoke or have only recently stopped smoking;
- have a family history of heart disease or stroke.

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## Healthy lifestyle

Adopting a healthy lifestyle is an important first step toward achieving and maintaining healthy cholesterol levels. The basics of cholesterol management include:

- Eating a diet that is lower in saturated and trans fats, and includes plenty of fruit, vegetables and whole grains;
- Being physically active, and accumulating 30 to 60 minutes of moderate physical activity most (or all) days of the week;
- Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight;
- Limiting excess alcohol intake;
- Being smoke-free.

## Fitness and health

Physical activity is a lifesaver. It cuts the risk of heart disease and stroke almost in half. It can also reduce your risk of diabetes, colon cancer, osteoporosis, stroke, depression, stress and anxiety.

Physical activity plays a very important role in improving your cholesterol levels and overall heart health. Regular physical activity such as brisk walking, swimming or cycling done for 30 to 60 minutes a day, most days of the week may increase your HDL “good” cholesterol.



## EAT HEALTHY

### The new Food Guide recommends:

- Eating plenty of vegetables and fruit. Every day, include a dark green (such as broccoli, asparagus and romaine lettuce) and an orange (such as carrots and sweet potato) vegetable.
- Making half of your grain products whole grain (such as brown and wild rice and oatmeal) each day.
- Serving fish twice a week (such as rainbow trout, salmon and sardines).
- Including beans, lentils and tofu more often in your diet.
- Drinking lower fat milk and milk alternatives such as fortified soy beverages.
- Using unsaturated oils such as canola, olive, and soybean as well as non-hydrogenated margarines (no more than 30 to 45 mL/2 to 3 tbsp a day).

### The new Food Guide also recommends limiting:

- Foods and beverages high in calories, fat, sugar or salt.
- Saturated fats from fatty meats, butter, lard, shortening and hard margarines.
- Trans fats in such foods as doughnuts, cookies and other baked goods.
- Salt (sodium)
- Sugar in such items as soft drinks and desserts

Source: [www.fmcoeur.qc.ca](http://www.fmcoeur.qc.ca)

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