

Understanding Your Screening Numbers

Total Cholesterol, LDL & HDL



What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is an essential component of human health with several functions in the body. It's used to make hormones, fat-soluble vitamins, and bile acids to help digest food.

Although cholesterol serves an important role in the body, too much can increase risk of heart disease and stroke.

What are the types of cholesterol?

Total cholesterol (TC) is a measurement of all the types of cholesterol in your blood. These cholesterol types include:

vLDL vLDL carries fat used to store and release calories (energy) after meals

LDL LDL is typically referred to as the "bad" cholesterol. It's very sticky and contributes to plaque buildup in the arteries. *Tip: Remember LDL is the Lousy cholesterol and you should aim to keep it Low.*

HDL HDL is often thought of as the "good" cholesterol. It helps reduce plaque in the arteries by picking up LDL and taking it back to the liver to be broken down and removed from the body. *Tip: Remember HDL is the Heat Halthy cholesterol and you should aim to keep it High.*

What do my numbers mean?

Total Cholesterol	Adults (mg/dL)	
	Desirable	<200
	Borderline	200-239
	High Risk	>240

LDL	Adults (mg/dL)	
	Desirable	<100
	Borderline High	130-159
	High Risk	160-189
	Very High Risk	>190

HDL	Males (mg/dL)	Females (mg/dL)	
	Desirable	>60	>60
	Borderline	40-60	50-60
	High Risk	<40	<50

TC/HDL Ratio	Males (mg/dL)	Females (mg/dL)	
	Desirable	<3.5	<3.5
	High Risk	>5	>5

Source: 2018 Cholesterol Clinical Practice Guidelines

What is my risk level?

Your risk level is assessed by looking at all cholesterol numbers as one big picture, instead of focusing on just one type. In general, a low TC/HDL ratio is associated with a lower risk of heart disease or stroke, and elevated total cholesterol and/or LDL are considered high risk. However, **elevated LDL cholesterol is associated with an increased risk of heart disease or stroke, even when total cholesterol is within the normal range.** Discuss your cholesterol numbers with your primary care doctor to better understand your risk level.

Improving Your Numbers Through Lifestyle

Total Cholesterol, LDL & HDL



Canada Eat Well Plate

Embrace a Heart-Healthy Diet!

- **Avoid *trans* fats.** These are found in fried foods, some margarines, shortenings and convenience foods.
- **Limit saturated fats** found in fatty cuts of meat, full-fat dairy, cheese, butter, fried food, baked goods and processed snack items.
- **Include heart-healthy unsaturated fats.** Unsaturated fats can be found in fish and many plant-based foods such as nuts, seeds and avocados. The American Heart Association recommends eating 2 servings of fatty fish per week (i.e. salmon, tuna, mackerel, herring).
- **Fill most of your plate with vegetables and fruit.** Aim to make half of your plate plant-based with vegetables and/or fruit at every meal.
- **Include plant-based protein from beans and legumes.** Not only are beans and legumes low in saturated fat, but they are also a good source of soluble fiber which may help lower LDL cholesterol.
- **Choose 100% whole grains.** Whole grains like brown rice, quinoa, oats, popcorn and whole wheat flour products are more nutrient-dense compared to refined grains like white bread and white rice.
- **Limit foods with added sugar.** Added sugar is often found in sugar-sweetened beverages (i.e. soda, tea, sports drinks), pastries, candy and other sweets.

Maintain a Healthy Weight

- For individuals with weight categorized as overweight or obese, **reducing weight by 5-10% over 6 months can help improve blood cholesterol numbers.**

Quit Smoking

- **Smokers are at a higher risk of heart disease compared to non-smokers.** If you currently smoke, quitting may help improve your cholesterol numbers.

Get Moving!

- Routine exercise can help increase HDL cholesterol levels and lower risk of heart disease and stroke.
- The American Heart Association recommends at least **150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity and two days of muscle-strengthen activity.** Aim to spread out exercise throughout the week for maximum benefits.



Notes
