

Understanding Your Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a fat-like, waxy substance. Your liver produces as much cholesterol as your body needs. You also consume cholesterol when you eat certain foods, including meat, poultry and full-fat dairy foods. You need cholesterol for good health, however too much can increase your risk for the buildup of plaque on your artery walls. This causes them to thicken or harden into atherosclerosis, which narrows arteries and makes it harder for your heart to pump blood. That plaque can break off the artery wall and form clots.

Types of Cholesterol



There are two types of cholesterol:

HDL and LDL (high- and low-density lipoprotein). You want high HDL levels and low LDL levels. A complete cholesterol test will also measure your triglycerides, another type of blood fat.

Total cholesterol = HDL + LDL + 20% of your triglycerides

Risk Factors for High Cholesterol



- Eating foods with saturated or trans fats
- Family history of high cholesterol or early heart disease
- Smoking
- High blood pressure
- Age (over 45 for men, over 55 for women)

Control Your Cholesterol



High cholesterol is one of the major controllable risk factors for heart disease, heart attack, and stroke. Eating a healthy diet, exercising and quitting smoking will help lower your cholesterol.

If your doctor recommends cholesterol-lowering medications, follow her directions closely and do not skip doses or stop taking your medications without talking to your doctor first.

Optimal Cholesterol Numbers



Total Cholesterol:	< 200 mg/dL
HDL:	> or equal to 60 mg/dl
LDL:	< 100 mg/dL
Triglycerides:	< than 150 mg/dL



Dignity Health.
Heart and Vascular Institute
of Greater Sacramento