



HEART UK  
THE CHOLESTEROL CHARITY

# Easy Mini-Guide to Cholesterol

Charity Registration No: 1003904

# So, just what is Cholesterol?

**Cholesterol is a type of blood fat (lipid). We all need some cholesterol in our blood to stay healthy, but too much can lead to serious health problems in the future, including heart attacks and strokes.**

## What causes high cholesterol?

Lots of different things play a part in your cholesterol levels, including your lifestyle, other health problems, and your genes these can all add up to raise your cholesterol and your risk of illness.

### > Your Lifestyle

A number of things you do can lead to high cholesterol:

- Eating too much saturated fat.
- Smoking.
- Drinking more alcohol than is recommended.
- Not being physically active.

### > Your Genes

High cholesterol can be genetic, meaning you inherit it from your parents:

- Familial hypercholesterolaemia (FH for short) can cause very high cholesterol, even if you have a healthy lifestyle.
- There are other genetic causes of high cholesterol too.

### > Your Overall health

Your overall health and other health problems can have an effect, for example:

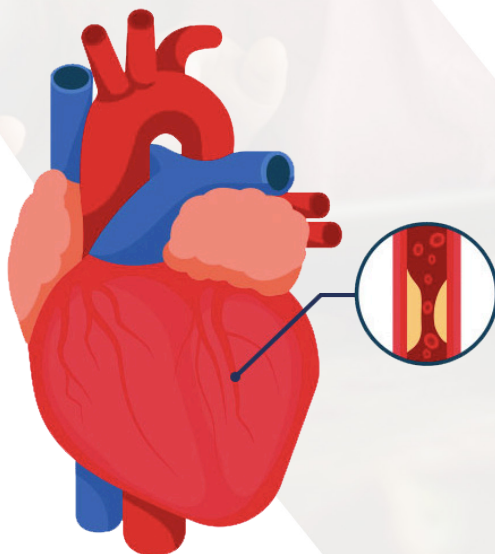
- Being overweight.
- An underactive thyroid gland.
- Type 2 diabetes.
- Liver disease.
- Kidney disease.
- Certain medications.

## Who can be affected?

Anyone can have high cholesterol – even if you are young, slim, eat well and exercise. That's because high cholesterol can be caused by different things, from an unhealthy lifestyle to genetics.

High cholesterol is very common, but most people don't know they have it because it doesn't usually have any symptoms. That's why everyone should have a cholesterol check.

If your cholesterol is raised, there are treatments available if you need them. But it's usually possible to lower cholesterol naturally with healthy lifestyle changes.



**Too much cholesterol in the blood can create blockages, leading to heart and circulatory diseases.**

# Where to get help?

## How to test for high cholesterol?

**We recommend that all adults should get a cholesterol check – no matter what your age or how healthy you feel.**

High cholesterol doesn't usually have any signs or symptoms, so the only way to know your cholesterol levels is to have a test.

A cholesterol check involves a simple blood test. Your doctor should also check your levels of another fat called triglycerides, as these also affect your heart health.



## Where to get a test?

**There are three main ways you can get a test.**

- Visit your pharmacist.
- Visit your GP.
- Get an NHS Health Check.

While you can get tested at home, we recommend you visit a health professional. You can read more about testing at home here.



Find out more about getting a cholesterol test

## What do your test results mean?

### **Total cholesterol**

This is sometimes written as 'serum cholesterol' or 'TC' and refers to the overall level of cholesterol, but it's not just the total cholesterol that's important.

### **Non-HDL cholesterol**

Your non-HDL cholesterol is your total cholesterol minus your HDL cholesterol. It's the LDL and all the other 'bad' cholesterol added together, and ideally should be as low as possible.

### **TC:HDL ratio**

You might be given a ratio of HDL compared to the total cholesterol, written as TC:HDL ratio. You can work it out from your HDL and total cholesterol numbers. This should be as low as possible. Above 6 is considered high.

### **HDL cholesterol**

Your HDL cholesterol (high density lipoprotein, or 'good' cholesterol) helps clear the cholesterol out of your arteries, while your LDL cholesterol (low density lipoprotein, or 'bad' cholesterol) can clog them up. So your HDL cholesterol should be above 1mmol/L in men and above 1.2mmol/L in women, ideally around 1.4mmol/L. Currently our specialists believe that levels above this may not provide additional protection.

### **Interpreting your results**

Your cholesterol results should be interpreted in relation to any other risk factors you may have and any other health conditions (such as diabetes). Because of other risk factors or medical conditions, your doctor may recommend lowering your cholesterol level.

# How to manage your cholesterol

The good news is that even the small steps you take to lower your cholesterol all add up. You'll also lower your risk of other illnesses or stop them from getting worse. Lowering your cholesterol can typically be done through a combination of regular exercise and healthy habits in your lifestyle, however some people will need medication to manage their cholesterol.

## Healthy living

**Making some simple changes to your lifestyle can keep your cholesterol levels in check and your heart healthier.**

Eating a healthy diet, keeping active, cutting down on alcohol, avoiding smoking and looking after any other health problems you may have can all help.



## Exercise

**Being active is a major part of looking after your cholesterol levels, keeping your heart healthy and preventing heart disease. It can:**

- Raise your HDL cholesterol levels – the good cholesterol which removes fat from your arteries.
- Lower your LDL cholesterol – the kind that builds up in your arteries.
- Help you to lose weight or stay a healthy weight.
- Lower your blood pressure.
- Lower the risk of diabetes and help control diabetes.

## How much should you do?

- **Adults** should aim to do at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity or 75 minutes of intense activity every week.
- **Children and young people under 18** should aim to do at least 1 hour of activity every day.
- **Children under the age of 5** who can walk without help should be active for at least 3 hours a day, spread throughout the day.

If you're not used to exercising or you have health problems, such as high blood pressure or heart disease, talk to your doctor about what's safe for you. They should also be able to give you ideas for exercise schemes in your area.

## Easy ways to get more activity in your day!

- Hop off the bus or tube a stop early and walk.
- Take the stairs, not the escalator.
- Go for regular walk, before breakfast or at lunchtime.
- Park further away from the shops and walk the rest of the way.

# Heart healthy recipes!

Take a look at our most popular heart-healthy, low-cholesterol recipes, which have all been reviewed by our qualified Dietetic Advisor.



[Full recipe & method >](#)



## Chicken Marengo

Preparation time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 30 minutes

Serves: 4

Nutrition: Per Serving

Energy  
360 Kcal

Fat  
11g

Saturates  
2.2g

Sugars  
8.8g

Salt  
0.9g

This flavourful French stew combines boneless chicken breasts, tomatoes and mushrooms with red wine. Bon Appétit!



[Full recipe & method >](#)

## Mediterranean Salmon Pasta

Preparation time: 20 minutes

Cooking time: 10 minutes

Serves: 2

Nutrition: Per Serving

Energy  
598 Kcal

Fat  
23g

Saturates  
4.1g

Sugars  
6.5g

Salt  
0.97g

A fresh, zingy pasta dish that's ready in next to no time and packed full of heart-healthy ingredients.





[Full recipe & method >](#)

## Spicy Pasta

Preparation time: 8 minutes

Cooking time: 20 minutes

Serves: 6

Nutrition: Per Serving

Energy  
339 Kcal

Fat  
4.7g

Saturates  
0.7g

Sugars  
9g

Salt  
Trace

A low fat, fail-safe pasta dish with rich, bold flavours that you can cook in less than half an hour.



[Full recipe & method >](#)

## Chinese Chicken Curry

Preparation time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 40 minutes

Serves: 4

Nutrition: Per Serving

Energy  
260 Kcal

Fat  
8.3g

Saturates  
0.8g

Sugars  
4.2g

Salt  
0.36g

A healthier alternative to a classic Chinese chicken curry.

Explore more low-cholesterol recipes!



# National Cholesterol Month!

## October is National Cholesterol Month!

This year the “Let’s Talk About Cholesterol” campaign will help raise awareness of high cholesterol and the importance of knowing what your cholesterol numbers are.

We work with businesses, hospitals and brands of all different sizes to help raise awareness of the importance of knowing more about the effects of high cholesterol, so [get in touch](#) if you would like to join the conversation.



## The Great Cholesterol Challenge



If you’re looking to test yourself this October, take part in our “Great Cholesterol Challenge”! Being active is a major part of looking after your cholesterol levels, keeping your heart healthy and helping to prevent heart disease. Walk, cycle, run or swim 100 miles in October and get sponsored to help raise vital funds for HEART UK.

Simply open a ‘Virgin Money Giving’ page [here](#).

Looking for other ways to help? Why not host a bake sale, socially distanced coffee morning or tea party this October and raise vital funds for HEART UK? Check out some exciting new heart healthier tasty treat recipes on the [HEART UK website](#).



# Other resources

We've put together a list of helpful resources for more information about heart-health and how to get involved with HEART UK's amazing work!

Getting treatment >

HEART UK webinars >

Read our blog >

HEART UK Library >

Sign up for our e-news >



Thanks for reading!

Please visit

[www.heartuk.org.uk](http://www.heartuk.org.uk)