

## Managing Your Cholesterol

### What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a type of fat produced by your liver and taken in from the foods that you eat. Your body needs a certain amount of cholesterol to build cell walls, produce hormones, and protect nerve cells, but too much or too little cholesterol can create a major health risk.

### How can my cholesterol levels be dangerous to my health?

High total cholesterol can lead to atherosclerosis, a hardening of the arteries that blocks flow of blood and increases your risk for coronary artery disease (CAD), heart attack, and stroke.

### “Good,” “bad,” and “total” cholesterol

You may have heard people talk about “good,” “bad,” and “total” cholesterol. Bad cholesterol, or LDL, can lead to cholesterol build up that clogs the arteries. As with your total cholesterol level, the higher your LDL level, the higher your risk for heart disease. Your LDL cholesterol results will fall into one of the following categories:

LDL Level	Category
Less than 100mg/dL	Desirable
100-129 mg/dL	Near Optimal/Above Optimal
130-159 mg/dL	Borderline High
160-189 mg/dL	High
190 mg/dL and above	Very High

If your LDL level is 100 mg/dL or above, you are at increased risk for heart disease and should work with your health care provider to develop a plan to manage your cholesterol level.

Good cholesterol, or HDL, protects against heart disease. Unlike total and LDL cholesterol, for HDL cholesterol, more is better. Because HDL levels in women are normally higher than in men, it's desirable for women to maintain HDL levels of 60 mg/dL or higher to help decrease your risk for heart disease. The lower your HDL level, the higher your risk of heart disease. As a woman, if your HDL level is below 40 mg/dL, you are at increased risk for heart disease and should work with your health care provider to develop a plan to manage this. Your HDL cholesterol results will fall into one of the following categories:

HDL Level	Category
Less than 40 mg/dL	Low
60 mg/dL and above	Desireable

If your total cholesterol level is 200 or above, you are at increased risk for heart disease and should work with your health care provider to develop a plan to manage your cholesterol level. Your total cholesterol results will fall into one of the following categories:

Total Cholesterol Level	Category
Less than 200 mg/dL	Desirable
200 to 239 mg/dL	Borderline High
240 mg/dL and above	High





## Do I need to manage my cholesterol?

More than 25% of women in America have total and LDL cholesterol levels high enough to put them at risk for heart disease. Since having high total or LDL cholesterol or low HDL cholesterol itself does not cause any symptoms, many women may be unaware that their cholesterol levels are putting them at risk for heart disease. That's why it's so important for you to know what your cholesterol levels are.

All women over 20 years of age should have their total cholesterol levels checked by their doctors at least once every five years. Total and HDL cholesterol levels are measured first. Depending on your results, you may want to ask your doctor for an LDL level test as well. You will need to fast for up to 12 hours prior to the LDL test.

## What can I do to manage my cholesterol?

Your cholesterol levels are determined by many different factors, many of which you can control by making healthy lifestyle choices.

There are two basic ways to manage your cholesterol. The first is to modify your lifestyle by changing your diet, managing your weight, increasing exercise, and quitting smoking. The other is to use one or more cholesterol-lowering medications while modifying your lifestyle. Both treatment methods are aimed at lowering LDL cholesterol, raising HDL cholesterol, lowering triglycerides, and reducing other risk factors for heart disease. You should consult with your physician to determine the best course of action.

The National Cholesterol Education Program guidelines recommend Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes, including diet, exercise, and weight loss.

Statins, or cholesterol-lowering drugs, have been shown to be very effective in reducing LDL levels along with decreasing total cholesterol. Elevations in HDL cholesterol levels have also been observed. The effectiveness of statins, along with their low incidence of serious adverse events and good tolerability, has made these compounds the drug treatment of choice to reduce total and LDL cholesterol levels.

It is estimated that a 1% reduction in LDL cholesterol is equivalent to a 1% reduction in risk for cardiovascular disease. Therefore, a treatment option that is safe and offers the greatest reduction in LDL will be an important option for physicians and patients in their battle against elevated total and LDL cholesterol levels.

Remember that unsafe cholesterol levels are just one of many risk factors for coronary artery disease. Controlling other risk factors, such as smoking, high blood pressure, and diabetes is also important to reduce your overall risk.

## Take care. Take charge. Take heart.

Heart disease is the #1 killer of women. It is a greater threat than all cancers combined. Since 1984, more women than men have died each year of heart disease.

Silver Cross Hospital's Women's HeartAdvantage™ Program is committed to helping women with heart disease. But while there is much a hospital, its physicians and nurses can do, we can make an even greater difference together with you. Take care of yourself. Know what your risk is. Know what your heart health indicators are. And then take charge. Choose to quit smoking, to eat better, to exercise more, and to improve your health. Because women of America, this is your life. We hope you'll put your heart into it.

**For more information on Silver Cross Hospital's Women's HeartAdvantage™ Program or a referral to a Women's HeartAdvantage™ certified physician, call 1-888-660-HEAL (4325) or visit [www.silvercross.org](http://www.silvercross.org).**



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