



to reduce your risk of heart
and circulatory diseases



Your cholesterol levels

This leaflet is for people with high cholesterol. High levels of cholesterol can cause heart and circulatory diseases including heart attack and stroke. But, there are simple things you can do to help bring your cholesterol down to a healthy level like eating better and taking medication.

Cholesterol is a fatty substance in our blood, which is produced naturally in the liver. Everyone has cholesterol. We need it to stay healthy because every cell in our body uses it. Some of this cholesterol comes from the food that we eat.

There are two main types of cholesterol – one is good and the other is bad. Having too much bad cholesterol can cause problems. It can clog up your arteries, the blood vessels that carry blood to your major organs. If the arteries that carry blood to your heart get damaged and clogged, it can lead to a heart attack. If this happens in the arteries that carry blood to your brain it can lead to a stroke.

There are different types of cholesterol and they mean different things for your health.

Cholesterol is carried in your blood by proteins. When cholesterol and proteins combine, they're called lipoproteins. There are two main types:

Good
Bad

Your total cholesterol is your good HDL cholesterol and your bad non-HDL cholesterol together. For a healthy heart, the aim is to have a low non-HDL level and a higher HDL level.



High-density lipoproteins / HDL cholesterol

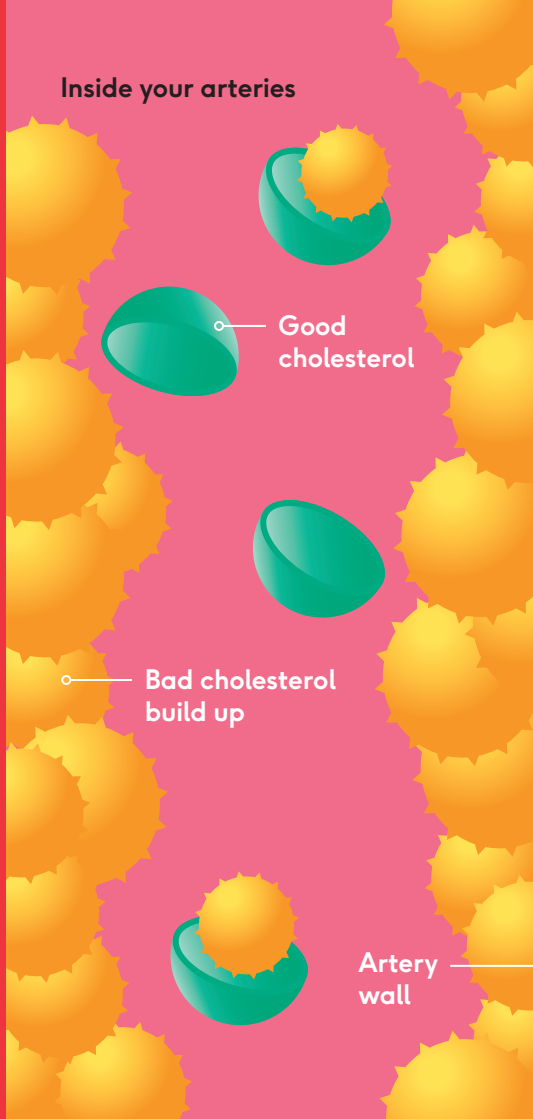
It takes cholesterol that you don't need back to the liver where it is broken down to be passed out of your body. This is known as 'good' cholesterol because it gets rid of 'bad' cholesterol from your blood vessels.



Non-High-density lipoproteins / Non-HDL cholesterol

It delivers cholesterol from the liver to cells around your body. This is known as 'bad' cholesterol because if you have too much it gets stuck to the walls of your arteries.

Inside your arteries



Good cholesterol

Bad cholesterol build up

Artery wall

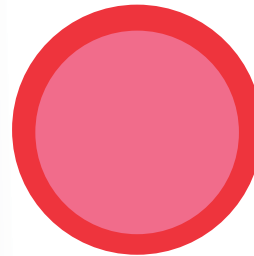
Too much bad cholesterol

If you have more bad cholesterol in your blood than you need, it gets stuck to the walls of the arteries. This makes it harder for blood to flow through, which can cause a heart attack or stroke.

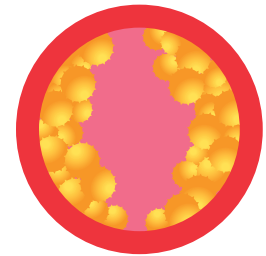
If your total cholesterol is high, it can mean you have a lot of bad (Non-HDL) cholesterol in your blood.

A high level of good (HDL) cholesterol can help keep that bad (Non-HDL) cholesterol in check and remove it from your body.

Inside the artery



Blood inside the artery



Atheroma (fatty material) building up

What causes high cholesterol?

Anyone can get high cholesterol and it can be caused by many different things. Some things we can control like lifestyle habits, others we can't. As long as you take care of the things you can control, you'll help lower your risk of heart and circulatory disease.

High cholesterol can be caused by:

Things you can control



Eating a lot of saturated or trans fats



Smoking



Not being active enough



Having too much body fat, especially around your middle

Things you can't help



Getting older



Ethnic background



Family History

"I've made changes and brought my cholesterol back down to normal. It's actually not that hard to make changes."

Shirley, age 53



How to get your cholesterol level down

You can reduce your chances of a condition like heart attack or stroke. Here are some of the ways you can help your cholesterol get back to a healthy level.

You may be prescribed medication to lower your cholesterol levels. Make sure you take these regularly.



Changing what you eat



Reducing how much alcohol you drink

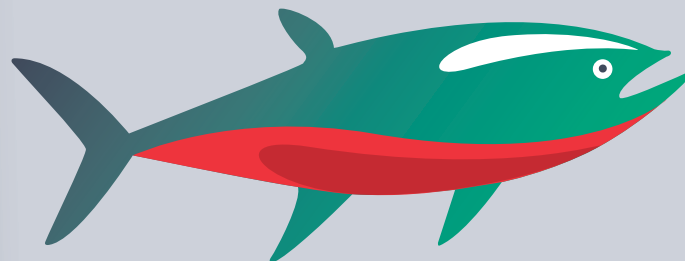


Being more active



Stopping smoking

Saturated fat and cholesterol



You need to eat less saturated fat to help bring your cholesterol levels in check.

Eating many foods high in saturated fat can increase your cholesterol levels. Saturated fat is mainly found in butter, lard, fatty meats, cheese, cakes, biscuits as well as palm and coconut oil.

Swap foods high in saturated fat for foods that contain unsaturated fats like rapeseed oil, olive oil or sunflower oil, as well as vegetable oil spreads, nuts, seeds and oily fish.

Healthier swaps

Consider swapping some everyday foods with healthier alternatives; a small handful of unsalted nuts instead of crisps, vegetable spreads instead of butter, reduced-fat cheese or a skinny latte instead of one with whole milk.



Normal milk and butter

Low-fat milk and low-fat spread



Normal sausages

Low-fat sausages



Chops or steak

The fat cut off

Look at labels

Look at the labels on the food you buy. Make sure you mostly eat things that are labelled green or amber for 'saturates'.

	FAT	SUGARS	SATURATES	SALTS
LOW Healthier choice	3g or less	5g or less	1.5g or less	0.3g or less
MED OK most of the time	3.1g to 17.5g	5.1g to 22.5g	1.6g to 5g	0.3g to 1.5g
HIGH Just occasionally	More than 17.5g	More than 22.5g	More than 5g	More than 1.5g

All measures as 100g



Move more

Increasing the amount you move your body strengthens your heart and reduces your bad cholesterol. Being active helps increase your good HDL cholesterol while helping your body move the bad Non-HDL cholesterol to your liver where it will be disposed of.

You don't have to join a gym or take up a sport, just look for chances to move more every day.



Taking the lift



Taking the stairs



A leisurely stroll



A brisk walk

Cut down or stop smoking

Smoking stops good cholesterol doing its job of getting rid of your bad cholesterol. Speak to your doctor about how to stop smoking as soon as you can – not smoking will really help you avoid heart disease.



Smoking daily



Stop smoking

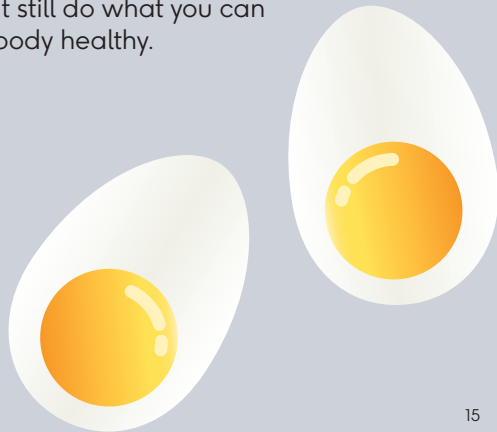
After you've been making changes for a while, go back to your doctor or nurse and ask them to test to see if you've got your cholesterol back to where it should be.

Good to know

Eggs, liver and kidneys as well as shellfish like prawns, do contain cholesterol.

You may hear this referred to as dietary cholesterol. For most people, this dietary cholesterol doesn't have much effect on blood cholesterol levels, so you can eat them as part of a healthy diet. It is much more important to reduce the amount of saturated fat you eat.

A medication called statins is sometimes prescribed to lower your cholesterol. It's important that you take them as instructed. But still do what you can to keep your body healthy.



Heart transplants. Clot busting drugs. Pacemakers. Breakthroughs born from visionary medical research. Research you fund with your donations.

Heart and circulatory diseases kill 1 in 4 people in the UK. They cause heartbreak on every street. But if research can invent machines to restart hearts, fix arteries in newborn babies, build tiny devices to correct heartbeats, and give someone a heart they weren't born with – imagine what's next.

We fund research into all heart and circulatory diseases and their risk factors. Heart attacks, heart failure, stroke, vascular dementia, diabetes and many more. All connected, all under our microscope. Our research is the promise of future prevention, cures and treatments.

The promise to protect the people we love. Our children. Our parents. Our brothers. Our sisters. Our grandparents. Our closest friends.

You and the British Heart Foundation. Together, we will beat heartbreak forever.

Beat heartbreak forever.