

The Truth About Cholesterol

We hear about cholesterol everywhere. Some people have high cholesterol, some foods are cholesterol-free and some medications help to lower cholesterol. September is National Cholesterol Education Month, so here are some facts about cholesterol. If you want to learn more, speak with your doctor or go to: <http://hp2010.nhlbi.nih.gov/cholesterolmonth/>.

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that is found in all cells of the body. Your body needs some cholesterol to work the right way. Your body makes all the cholesterol it needs. Cholesterol is also found in some of the foods you eat. Your body uses cholesterol to make hormones, vitamin D, and substances that help you digest foods. Too much cholesterol in the blood is called high blood cholesterol or hypercholesterolemia. High blood cholesterol increases the chance of having a heart attack or some other symptom of heart disease, like chest pain (angina). Lowering cholesterol is important for everyone—young, middle-aged, and older adults, and both men and women.

What are the different types of cholesterol?


Two kinds of lipoproteins carry cholesterol throughout your body. It is important to have healthy levels of both:

- ▶ Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol is sometimes called bad cholesterol. High LDL cholesterol leads to a buildup of cholesterol in arteries. The higher the LDL level in your blood, the greater chance you have of getting heart disease.
- ▶ High-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol is sometimes called good cholesterol. HDL carries cholesterol from other parts of your body back to your liver. The liver removes the cholesterol from your body. The higher your HDL cholesterol level, the lower your chance of getting heart disease.

What causes high blood cholesterol?

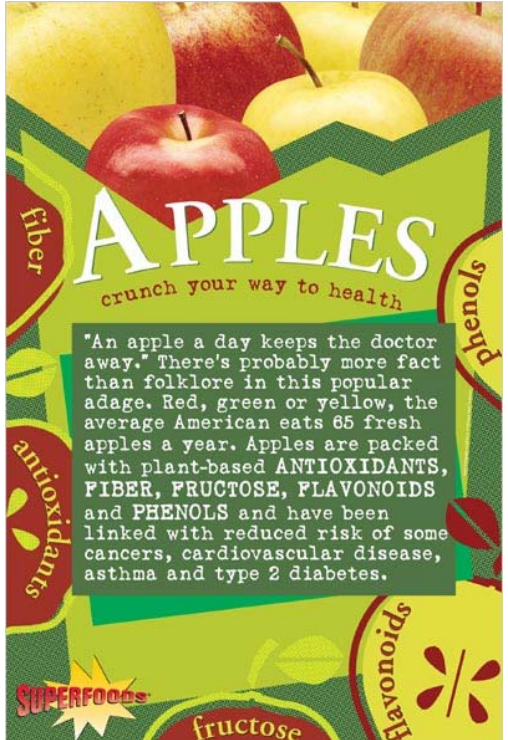
A variety of things can affect the cholesterol levels in your blood. Some of these things you can control and others you cannot. You can control:

- ▶ What you eat. Certain foods have types of fat that raise your cholesterol level. Saturated fat raises your low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol level more than anything else in your diet. Trans fatty acids (trans fats) are made when vegetable oil is hydrogenated to harden it. Trans fatty acids also raise cholesterol levels. Cholesterol is also found in foods that come from animal sources, for example, egg yolks, meat, and cheese.
- ▶ Your weight. Being overweight tends to increase your LDL level, lower your high-density lipoprotein (HDL) level, and increase your total cholesterol level.
- ▶ Your activity. Lack of regular exercise can lead to weight gain, which could raise your LDL cholesterol level. Regular exercise can help you lose weight and lower your LDL level. It can also help you raise your HDL level.



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