

Cholesterol: What do the numbers mean?

Healthy adults should have a cholesterol test at least once every 5 years. People with diabetes or coronary artery disease should have their cholesterol tested at least once a year. If you haven't been tested recently enough, ask your doctor about it. When you get your results, ask your doctor what the numbers mean. Your cholesterol level can affect your chances of having a heart attack or a stroke.

Cholesterol tests can measure the amount of total cholesterol in your blood, as well as the amount of "LDL cholesterol" and "HDL cholesterol." LDL cholesterol is considered "bad." It builds up on the walls of your blood vessels and can cause disease. HDL cholesterol is considered "good." It helps remove bad cholesterol from the bloodstream.

What Can You Do?

If your blood tests show that you have high total or LDL (bad) cholesterol, or low HDL (good) cholesterol, you are at increased risk for heart attack and stroke. Luckily there are things you can do to improve those numbers.

Regular physical activity can help raise HDL (good) cholesterol and lower LDL (bad) cholesterol. Other things that can help include:

- Losing weight if you are overweight;
- Eating foods rich in fiber; and
- Avoiding high-fat foods.

There are even medications that can lower LDL cholesterol and raise HDL cholesterol. But if your doctor prescribes one of these medications, don't assume it's OK to eat unhealthy foods. The medications work together with your lifestyle approaches. They do not replace them.

A Health Coach Can Help

If you have questions about your cholesterol levels, call a Health Coach. Health Coaches are specially trained healthcare professionals, such as nurses, dietitians, and respiratory therapists. They are available by phone, anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at no charge to you.

To talk to a Health Coach, call [1-800-658-2750](tel:1-800-658-2750). You can also get information online at www.thedialogcenter.com/bcbsnd.