

NATIONAL CHOLESTEROL

AWARENESS MONTH

Know Your Numbers. Protect Your Heart.

September is National Cholesterol Education Month, making it a perfect time to learn about cholesterol, its impact on your health, and how to manage it effectively. High cholesterol often has no symptoms, but understanding its risks and taking proactive steps can help protect your heart and overall health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), from 2017 to 2020, 86.4 million U.S. adults age 20 and older had high or borderline high cholesterol.

WHAT IS CHOLESTEROL?

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance your body needs in small amounts to build cells, make hormones, produce vitamin D, protect nerve fibers, and help digest fat. However, too much cholesterol in the blood can lead to plaque buildup in the arteries, increasing the risk of heart disease and stroke.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Cholesterol comes from:

- Your body, which makes cholesterol naturally, mostly in the liver
- Animal-based foods, which contain dietary cholesterol

While plants do not contain cholesterol, some plant-based foods may contain saturated fat or trans fat, which can raise blood cholesterol levels.

UNDERSTANDING CHOLESTEROL NUMBERS

A blood test called a lipid profile measure:

- LDL (“bad”) cholesterol — high levels can lead to plaque buildup
- HDL (“good”) cholesterol — helps remove cholesterol from the bloodstream
- VLDL and triglycerides — other blood fats that may affect heart health

Your doctor will evaluate your cholesterol results along with other risk factors to determine the best treatment approach.

UNDERSTANDING CHOLESTEROL NUMBERS

Eat Smart

- Choose foods low in saturated fat and free of trans fat
- Eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, and lentils
- Increase fiber intake, especially from oats, beans, apples, oranges, and carrots
- Choose lean proteins and limit processed meats
- Select baked or grilled foods instead of fried foods
- If you eat dairy, choose low-fat or fat-free options
- Eat fatty fish such as salmon two to three times per week

CREATE HEALTHY HABITS

- Stay physically active
- Manage Stress
- Avoid tobacco
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Get quality sleep
- Limit alcohol
- Maintain a healthy weight

Because high cholesterol often has no symptoms, regular testing is important. A simple blood test called a lipid profile can measure your cholesterol levels, and your doctor can help determine how often you should be tested. In general, healthy adults should be tested every four to six years. Children and adolescents should be tested at least once between ages 9 and 11 and again between ages 17 and 21. People at higher risk—such as those with heart disease, diabetes, obesity, or a family history of high cholesterol—may need testing more often. If you are enrolled in EMR's medical and prescription drug plan, one cholesterol screening every 12 months is covered at 100% when you use an in-network provider.

For more information, visit the [National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/).

SOURCES

- <https://healthylearn.com/connerstrong/lh/what-is-cholesterol.html>
- <https://healthylearn.com/connerstrong/hc/cholesterol-health.html>
- <https://healthylearn.com/connerstrong/hn2/cholesterol-to-eat-or-not-to-eat.html>

Disclaimer: This information is for general educational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Please consult your healthcare provider with any questions about cholesterol screening or heart health. Coverage is subject to the terms of the plan, and exclusions may apply.

