



Student Health Center

UNC Wilmington

INSTRUCTION SHEET: HIGH CHOLESTEROL

Nearly half of American adults have blood cholesterol levels that are higher than the "desirable" range. About 25% of adults have levels high enough to put them at risk for heart and blood vessel disease.

- What is cholesterol and where does it come from?

Cholesterol is a waxy substance that our bodies need for maintaining function of the nervous system, skin, muscles, liver, intestines, and heart. Most of our cholesterol is made by the liver. The rest comes from what we eat. Cholesterol in our food comes only from animal foods: meat, eggs, dairy products, fish, and poultry.

- Why is high cholesterol a problem?

Cholesterol comes in several varieties, some of which are "good" and others that are "bad." To simplify, HDL (high-density lipoprotein) is good cholesterol, LDL (low-density lipoprotein) is "bad" cholesterol. Triglycerides, another type of fat-carrying particle, can also cause problems if elevated.

If LDL is elevated in the blood, some LDL cholesterol begins to stick to the walls of arteries. Good HDL cholesterol picks up LDL from artery walls and moves it to the liver for disposal. When there is a lot of LDL and not enough HDL, the arteries begin to narrow from the LDL deposits. This is the start of a disease called atherosclerosis, which can cause heart attacks and strokes.

MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO DECREASE YOUR CHOLESTEROL:

- 1) Exercise regularly. *Moving* exercise, such as walking, jogging, swimming, biking, etc. is best. If you are out of shape, start *slowly*.
- 2) Follow a low-fat diet. Eat fewer animal products in general. Eat less/leaner cuts of red meat. Replace red meat with fish and poultry. Eat more fiber-rich foods that help move cholesterol out of the body. Eat lots of fruits and vegetables.
- 3) If you are overweight, work steadily on losing weight.
- 4) If you have high blood pressure, keep your blood pressure under control (low salt diet, weight control, medications).
- 5) If you smoke, quit. Definitely!
- 6) If these safe, first steps do not lower your cholesterol, medicines are available that lower cholesterol levels and reduce risks of heart disease. But, continue the "self-help" measures above even if you take medicine.

Cholesterol test results often list four items: total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, HDL cholesterol, and triglyceride levels. Cholesterol levels help estimate risk for heart disease in the future.

They are guidelines only.

Total cholesterol:	Desirable: below 200 mg/dL
	Borderline risk: 200 to 240
	Undesirable risk: above 240
LDL Cholesterol:	Desirable: below 130 mg/dL
	Borderline risk: 130 to 160
	Undesirable risk: above 160
HDL cholesterol:	Borderline risk: 35 to 45
	Undesirable risk: below 35
Triglycerides:	Desirable: below 200 mg/dL
	Borderline risk: 200 to 400
	Undesirable risk: above 400