



American Heart Association.  
Reduce Your Risk™

# WHAT DOES MY LDL CHOLESTEROL NUMBER MEAN?

Low-density lipoprotein (LDL), also called LDL (bad) cholesterol, can cause fatty buildup (plaque) in your arteries. It's important to know your number because **too much LDL cholesterol can increase your risk for heart attack and stroke.** High LDL typically does not have symptoms, so it's important to have your number checked by your doctor.



## What can impact my LDL number?

- **Family history of high cholesterol** - A condition called familial hypercholesterolemia (FH).
- **Age** - LDL can rise with age.
- **Race and ethnicity** - People of Asian Indian, Filipino, Japanese and Vietnamese descent may have higher LDL.
- **Sex** - Until menopause, women tend to have lower LDL than men.
- **Unhealthy eating habits** - Eating too much saturated fat, such as that found in some meat and dairy products.
- **Not being physically active**
- **Tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke**
- **Heavy alcohol drinking**
- **Being overweight**

## How low can I go with my LDL?

- Various research studies on LDL have shown "lower is better."
- Talk to your doctor. If you're healthy, aim for an LDL below 100 mg/dL. **If you have a history of heart attack or stroke and are already on a cholesterol-lowering medication, your doctor may aim for your LDL to be 70 mg/dL or lower.**

## How often should I check my cholesterol?

Ask your doctor for the right frequency for you. Generally:

- Healthy **adults 20-39 years old** should have their cholesterol checked **every four to six years.**
- **Adults over age 40**, or those who have heart disease (including prior heart attack) or other risk factors, may need their cholesterol checked more often.

## Make a plan that works for you!

Work with your doctor to create a plan to lower your LDL including regular testing and follow-up appointments to make sure it's working. They might ask you to:

- ✓ Focus on healthy eating
- ✓ Be physically active
- ✓ Maintain a healthy weight
- ✓ Take medication as prescribed

**Be sure to write down questions or concerns and talk to your doctor if you are struggling with the recommended plan.**

Learn more at [heart.org/ldl](https://heart.org/ldl)