

Cholesterol Basic Facts

. . . Should You Know Your Cholesterol Ratio?

When you have your cholesterol checked, some laboratories may give you a number called a cholesterol ratio. This number is your total cholesterol or LDL level divided by your HDL level. The idea is that combining the levels into one number gives you an overall view of your risk for heart disease. But the ratio is too general: It is more important to know the value for each level separately because LDL- and HDL-cholesterol both predict your risk of heart disease.

. . . What Are Triglycerides?

Triglycerides are the form in which fat is carried through your blood to the tissues. The bulk of your body's fat tissue is in the form of triglycerides. Your triglycerides are measured whenever your LDL-cholesterol is checked. Triglyceride levels less than 200 mg/dL are considered normal. It is not clear whether high triglycerides alone increase your risk of heart disease. But many people with high triglycerides also have high LDL or low HDL levels, which do increase the risk of heart disease.

. . . Will Lowering My Blood Cholesterol Help Me Live Longer?

Many studies show that lowering cholesterol levels reduces the risk of illness or death from heart disease, which kills more men and women each year than any other illness. If you have heart disease, lowering your cholesterol level will probably help you to live longer. If you don't have heart disease, the studies so far do not show that you will live longer, but you will definitely reduce your risk of illness and death from heart attack.

. . . Is It Safe To Eat in a Heart-Healthy Way?

Eating in a way that is lower in saturated fat and cholesterol is safe and can be more nutritious than an eating plan higher in saturated fat and cholesterol. It will even meet the higher needs that women, children, and teenagers have for nutrients like calcium, iron, and zinc, and an eating pattern lower in total fat will reduce the risk for other chronic diseases, such as cancer. And an eating pattern lower in saturated fat, total fat, and cholesterol can still provide enough calories for the proper growth and development of children ages 2 and above. Special nutrient needs for fat exist for children who are 2 years or younger.

. . . How Much Will Your Cholesterol Levels Change?

Generally your blood cholesterol level should begin to drop a few weeks after you start eating the heart-healthy way. How much it drops depends on the amount of saturated fat you used to eat, how high your high blood cholesterol is, how much weight you lose if you are overweight, and how your body responds to the changes you make. Over time, you may reduce your cholesterol level by 5 to 35 mg/dL or even more.