



Cholesterol Management

What is cholesterol and why do we check it?

- Cholesterol is a type of fat in your blood needed by your body to build cells and make vitamins. It is also a building block for pubertal hormones (which is why we check levels before and after puberty, between 9-11 years and again between 18-21 years).
- We initially perform an abbreviated test with a finger stick sample. If those results are abnormal, we will likely order a more comprehensive lipid panel, done with a venipuncture.
- There are two main types of cholesterol:
 - LDL (Low-Density Lipoprotein), also known as “bad” cholesterol
 - HDL (High-Density Lipoprotein), also known as “good” cholesterol
- Keeping cholesterol balanced protects arteries from becoming clogged which can lead to heart disease (including stroke, heart attack, or even sudden death at a young age)

Reasons for high cholesterol

- Family history (genetics): High cholesterol can run in families, meaning some people naturally have higher levels due to genetics (known as familial hypercholesterolemia).
- Diet: Eating too many processed or high-fat foods (especially those with saturated and trans fats) can raise LDL (bad) cholesterol.
- Too little physical activity: Not getting enough exercise can lead to higher levels of LDL and lower levels of HDL (good) cholesterol.
- High BMI: Extra body fat can lead to higher cholesterol levels and other health issues

Dietary changes can help

1. **Eat high fiber foods:** whole grains (oats, barley, brown rice), fruits (apples, oranges, berries), vegetables (leafy greens), nuts (pistachios, walnuts, almonds), and seeds (pumpkin, flax, and chia seeds)
2. Choose **lean protein** such as chicken, turkey, and fish rather than red meat
3. Choose healthy fats (avocado, olive oil, nuts) and **avoid foods trans fats** (listed on food labels as "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil" and often used in margarines and store-bought cookies, crackers and cakes). **Limit saturated fats** found in red meats, butter, and full-fat dairy. Choose milk, yogurt and cheeses that are low-fat or non-fat.
4. Add **omega 3-fatty acids**. For those who don't like fish, this can be taken as a supplement. Adding foods like nuts and avocado can be helpful.
5. **Limit processed and fried foods:** Skip packaged snacks, fast food, and fried items.



Exercise can help

Exercise can be really helpful for cholesterol levels as well as BMI. **Start with 30 minutes 3 times/week** and gradually increase to 60 minutes 5 times/week. **Mix it Up** and include both aerobic activities (such as running or swimming) and strength training (like weightlifting or resistance exercises once over 12 years). It's important to **Build Up Slowly** by starting with lighter activities.

Other health benefits

- Regular physical activity and a healthy diet not only manage cholesterol but also **reduces risks of chronic health conditions such as obesity and type 2 diabetes.**
- Consistent exercise also **helps with focus in school, sleep, stress,** and self-esteem. It teaches teamwork and sportsmanship. It can even help avoid with avoiding risk-taking behaviors like smoking, drinking, and using drugs

How to make new habits stick

Dietary and physical activity changes can be really hard, but **you can do it!**

1. Start Small: Focus on one habit at a time. For example, instead of aiming for an hour-long workout daily, start with 10 minutes. Gradual progress is more sustainable.
2. Set Specific Goals: Clearly define the habit. Instead of saying "I'll eat healthier," try "I'll add one vegetable to each meal." This clarity makes it easier to follow through.
3. Tie the Habit to an Existing Routine. Link the new habit to something already in your daily routine. For example, do a quick workout after brushing your teeth in the morning.
4. Create Visual Reminders. Use sticky notes, phone alarms, or habit trackers to remind yourself of the new habit. Seeing these cues regularly helps reinforce behavior.
6. Reward Yourself. Celebrate small wins. For instance, if you successfully exercise for a week, reward yourself with something you enjoy, like a movie or a treat
7. Get Support. Share your goal with friends or family who can encourage and keep you accountable. Better yet, practice the habit together.
8. Be Patient and Persistent. Accept that setbacks happen and do not give up after a slip.
9. Make it Enjoyable. Find ways to make the habit fun.

Continue to monitor

- If cholesterol levels are abnormal, we typically recommend retesting after 3–6 months
- With recommended changes, cholesterol levels can improve within a few months

SMALL CHANGES in daily choices can have a BIG IMPACT on your health

1600 West 38th St · Suite 100 · Austin, TX 78731 (512) 458-5323 · Fax (512) 458-2030

References: American Academy of Pediatrics. "Healthy Children: Heart Health," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "High Cholesterol Facts," World Health Organization (WHO). "Healthy Diet." <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/fitness/Pages/Making-Fitness-a-Way-of-Life.aspx>,