

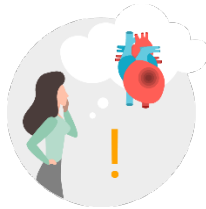
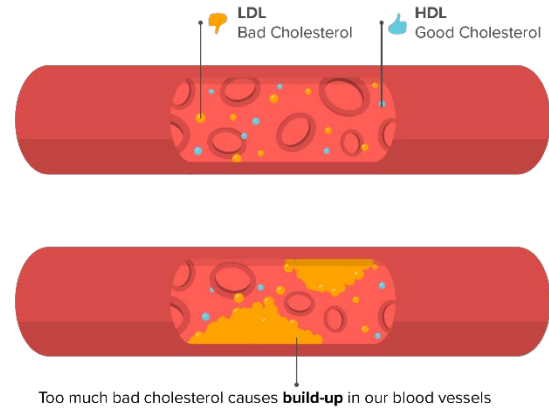


For more information, please visit: <https://cholesterol-tool.ucalgary.ca/understanding-cholesterol/>

Understanding Cholesterol

WHAT IS CHOLESTEROL?

Cholesterol refers to a group of fats found in our blood. Our body needs some cholesterol to work properly. We have both good cholesterol (high-density lipoprotein or HDL) and bad cholesterol (low-density lipoprotein or LDL). It is important for your health to keep your bad cholesterol or LDL levels low.



HOW COMMON IS HIGH CHOLESTEROL AND WHY IS IT BAD TO HAVE HIGH CHOLESTEROL?

About 1 in 3 adults in Canada have high cholesterol. Too much bad cholesterol leads to inflammation and build up of deposits/blockages in your blood vessels. As your cholesterol rises, the build up of cholesterol:

- Causes heart attacks
- Causes strokes
- Can lead to damage in our kidneys
- Limits blood flow through your body, like your legs, and a variety of other problems

WHAT CAUSES HIGH CHOLESTEROL?

There are many things that can cause high cholesterol:

- Unhealthy diet
- Higher body fat
- Low level of physical activity
- Smoking
- Age
- Family history and genetics



WHY WOULD I WANT TO LOWER MY CHOLESTEROL?

Lowering your cholesterol can lower your chance of a heart attack or stroke, and support a longer healthier life.



HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE HIGH CHOLESTEROL?

Having high cholesterol does not make you feel sick or unwell. The only way to know if you have high cholesterol is to get a blood test.

The Canadian Cardiovascular Society guidelines recommends checking your cholesterol:

- At the age of 40 years, and after that check your cholesterol every 5 years
- Or, if you have other/or develop risk factors your doctor might choose to get your cholesterol checked more often – [Click here to read more about risk factors for high cholesterol](#)

After your blood test, your doctor will review your results with you. In addition, they will discuss your medical history and present health.

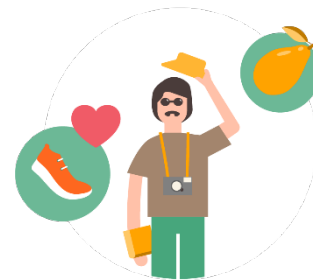
If you live in Alberta, you can sign up for MyHealth Alberta to see your own results.

HOW DO I LOWER HIGH CHOLESTEROL?

There are many things you can do that can lower your cholesterol.

Having healthy lifestyle habits will help lower your risk of high cholesterol. This can include:

- Eating a **healthy diet**
- **Being active**
- **Maintaining a healthy weight**



There are also medications (**statins**) that can help. Statins are a long-term treatment. A statin is a type of medication that can help lower your cholesterol.

- The most common statin medications cost about \$10 to \$12 a month plus any pharmacy fees in Alberta. Statins are covered by medical benefits insurance providers.
- Talking about cholesterol management with your doctor and healthcare professional will help you decide on what is best for you.

DO STATINS HAVE SIDE EFFECTS?

Most side effects from statins are mild and uncommon. About 5 to 10 people of every 100 who take a statin may have side effects. The most common side effect is muscle aches and usually occurs in the large muscles like the arms or the legs. If it does happen, let your doctor or health care provider know. Muscle aches can be managed by changing to another kind of statin or lowering the dose. This side effect does not cause any long-term muscle damage.



Did you know? Some statins are not safe with grapefruit (juice). Combining grapefruit with your statin medication can increase the chance of side effects.