

Cholesterol Tips for Kids and Teens



*Cholesterol
isn't just a concern
for adults*



You may have heard adults say that they were “watching their cholesterol.” Some kids and teens need to watch their cholesterol, too. If your cholesterol level is high, it can damage your heart as time goes by. If you choose nutritious foods, get enough physical activity, and don't smoke, you'll be doing all that you can to keep your cholesterol low and your heart strong. You'll feel the difference now, and you'll stay healthy later.

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a waxy fat that your body makes. Too much cholesterol can build up inside the arteries of the heart making it difficult for blood to flow. If cholesterol blocks your arteries, you could have a heart attack.

Actually, there are two main kinds of cholesterol: Good cholesterol and bad cholesterol.

1. *Good cholesterol, or high-density lipoproteins (HDL)*, pick up the bad cholesterol in your blood and take it to the liver where it's removed from the body. HDL cholesterol lowers the risk of heart disease and stroke. Exercise increases the amount of HDL.
2. *Bad cholesterol, or low-density lipoproteins (LDL)*, pick up cholesterol from the liver and fatty foods and deliver it to the cells. When there is more cholesterol than can be handled, the extra cholesterol sticks onto your artery walls. Too much LDL cholesterol will end up blocking the passageway making it hard for blood to pass. This can eventually lead to heart disease. Losing weight lowers the amount of LDL (bad cholesterol).

How do I make sure my bad cholesterol is low?

1. **Cut the fat.** Many of our foods are loaded with fat. Changing to lower fat foods can be an easy way to help lower your bad cholesterol.
 - Choose nonfat or low-fat foods and milk. Aim for at least 5 fruits and veggies a day. Skip the fried food.

2. **Get fit.** Find ways to get at least 30 to 60 minutes of exercise a day. Aerobic exercise (like walking, running, swimming, roller blading, or basketball) is a great way to keep your heart in the best shape possible. Also:
 - Cut down on watching T.V. and playing video games to no more than one hour a day. Swap one hour of T.V. time for a new activity.
 - Join a sports team at school or at the community center.
3. **Don't use tobacco.** Cigarettes, cigars, and chewing-tobacco increase your chances of heart disease by lowering your good cholesterol.
 - Call your doctor or nurse practitioner for help quitting.
 - The California Smokers' Helpline is a free service made for teens to help you kick the habit. Call 1-800-NO-BUTTS to get help.

Who should be tested (screened) for cholesterol?

Kids and teens whose parents or grandparents have a family history of early heart disease should be tested for cholesterol. Think about getting a cholesterol test if:

- Your parent or grandparent had a heart attack or stroke before the age of 55 years for males and 65 years for females.
- Your parent has high cholesterol (240 mg/dl or higher).

How do I get my cholesterol tested?

If you and your medical professional decide that you need your cholesterol tested, a simple blood test will be ordered. This test is usually reported as “Total Cholesterol,” but it is often further broken down by HDL (or “good” cholesterol) and LDL (or “bad cholesterol”) scores. Basically, you want low scores for both total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol and higher numbers for HDL cholesterol.

Here is a guide for evaluating your total cholesterol score:

| Risk | Total Cholesterol Score |
|------------|-------------------------|
| Low | Under 170 mg/dl |
| Borderline | Between 170-199 mg/dl |
| High | 200 mg/dl or higher |

What should I do if I have high cholesterol?

There are many ways you can start lowering your cholesterol. The most important changes you can make are by eating healthy and by being active. This way, not only will you feel and look better, but you'll be lowering your cholesterol and making your heart strong.

Eating habits

- Eat fewer fatty foods:

| Instead of: | Try: |
|---------------|------------------------|
| cookies | graham crackers |
| cole slaw | raw vegetables |
| fried chicken | grilled chicken |
| whole milk | low-fat or nonfat milk |
| french fries | baked potato |
| doughnuts | bagels |
| ice cream | low-fat frozen yogurt |

- Eat more fish. Most fish has a special kind of fat that helps lower cholesterol.
- Eat more foods high in fiber. Try eating 5 helpings of fruits and vegetables a day. One serving is equal to a piece of fruit or 1/2 to 1 cup of vegetables.
- Cut down on sodas and fruit drinks to no more than 1 can or small cup a day.
- Keep healthy snacks for between classes or after school. Pretzels, bagels, air-popped popcorn, and baby carrots are easy to keep in your backpack.
- Choose low-fat foods more often. Low-fat foods contain 3 grams or less per serving. Check out the label for fat content and serving sizes.
- Talk to your family about choosing low-fat and low-cholesterol meals.

Activity and exercise

- Get up and play hard for at least 30 to 60 minutes a day. Find what kind of exercise is right for you and make it part of your routine.
- Cut back on T.V. and video games to no more than one hour a day.

| Instead of: | Try: |
|------------------------------|--|
| the elevator | the stairs |
| driving to school | walking or biking |
| hanging with friends | go on a walk with your friends or play sports |
| sitting around on rainy days | jumping rope, the hula-hoop, or indoor hopscotch |

What if I like fast food?

All fast food isn't bad. Watching what you eat and how often you eat it can help reduce the fat and cholesterol in your fast-food meals.

- Order food without cheese, sour cream, or mayonnaise (catsup and mustard are okay).
- Avoid deep-fried foods like fries, chips, onion rings, tacos, and fried meats (chicken, fish).
- Drink water or low-fat milk instead of soda.
- Don't supersize! When serving sizes are larger, share your meal with a friend or order the smaller sizes.
- Order the sandwich and hold the fries. Try a side salad instead.
- Try a veggie burger.

Other resources

Books

- *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook* has sections on “How to Reduce Your Cholesterol” and “15 Simple Ways to Reduce Fat.” Call 1-800-464-4000 for your own copy.
- *Healthy Eating for Weight Management (Nutrition and Fitness for Teens)*, Mary Turck.
- *Food and You: A Guide to Healthy Eating Habits for Teens*, Marjoijin Bijlefeld and Sharon Zoumaris.

Web sites

- Kaiser Permanente
www.kp.org
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
www.nhlbi.nih.gov
- California Project Lean
www.caprojectlean.org

Kaiser Permanente Healthphone
(1-800-33-ASK ME)

Kaiser Permanente Health Education
Centers

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor.