



**KAISER PERMANENTE®**

## Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a waxy substance produced by your body. Some cholesterol in your blood is needed for your body to function. However, too much cholesterol can cause a build-up on the walls inside the blood vessels and decrease the flow of blood, increasing your risk of heart attack and stroke. The higher your cholesterol level, the higher your risk.

If you're between the ages of 40 and 65, you should be tested for cholesterol about every five years. After the age of 65, high cholesterol stops being a good predictor of heart disease. If you're under the age of 40, you should be tested if you smoke cigarettes or have high blood pressure, diabetes, or a family history of early heart attack. All these factors contribute to your risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

Ideally, your cholesterol level should be under 200. If it's between 200 and 239, you're considered "borderline," or possibly at risk for heart disease. If it's over 240, you're considered at high risk.

If your cholesterol level is higher than 200, you should take steps to lower it. For most people, this means adopting a low-fat, high-fiber diet and making lifestyle changes. For people with the highest risk of heart disease, medications may also be recommended.

Here are nine tips to follow for a low-fat, high-fiber diet:

- 1.) Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, grains, breads, pasta, and beans.
- 2.) Stick to nonfat or low-fat milk and cheeses.
- 3.) Limit yourself to four eggs a week.
- 4.) Eat lots of fish and chicken, always removing the chicken skin before eating.
- 5.) Select lean cuts of meat, such as round or loin cuts, and eat smaller portions of them.
- 6.) Broil, bake, grill, or poach poultry, fish, and meat instead of frying.
- 7.) Steam or sauté vegetables, never using more than a teaspoon of oil.
- 8.) Use liquid cooking oil—such as olive, canola, corn, or sunflower oil—rather than hard vegetable fat or shortening.
- 9.) Cut down on your intake of crackers, chips, cookies, ice cream, pastries, and rich desserts.

You may also have to make lifestyle changes to lower your cholesterol level. For example, you

may need to exercise more, quit smoking, and shed a few extra pounds. In addition to lowering your cholesterol, making these sorts of changes can also reverse heart disease that has already begun.

If you've had high cholesterol and then made lifestyle changes, you will need to continue them for the rest of your life. So make changes you can live with for the long term. Help with these changes is available from your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center in the form of classes, support groups, books, or videos. Many communities also have programs. Your family might help you to make and stay with these healthy choices. Your health care professional can guide you to resources and also advise you when you should be retested.



For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at [www.kaiserpermanente.org/california](http://www.kaiserpermanente.org/california), then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button
- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION