



# Cholesterol Tips for Kids and Teens

You may have heard adults say they're "watching their cholesterol." But cholesterol isn't just a problem for adults. Some kids and teens need to watch their cholesterol too. If the cholesterol level in your blood stays high over time it can damage your heart and blood vessels.

You can help keep your cholesterol low and your heart strong by:

- Eating healthy.
- Being physically active.
- Not smoking or vaping.

## What's cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance made by your body. If your blood has too much cholesterol, it builds up inside the heart's arteries. This makes it difficult for your blood to flow normally. When cholesterol blocks your arteries, it could cause a heart attack or stroke.

There are 2 types of cholesterol, "good" and "bad."

"Good" cholesterol is high-density lipoprotein (HDL). It takes "bad" cholesterol from your blood and delivers it to your liver where it's removed from your body. HDL lowers your risks for heart disease and stroke. Increase your HDL by exercising.

"Bad" cholesterol is low-density lipoprotein (LDL). It takes cholesterol from the liver and fatty foods and delivers it to your cells. Too much LDL blocks the arteries and reduces blood flow to the heart. Lower your LDL by exercising and eating healthy.

## How can I keep my "bad" cholesterol low?

### Eat little or no saturated fat.

Fried and many processed foods are loaded with this type of fat.

- Choose nonfat or low-fat foods and dairy foods.
- Read food labels. Avoid food with trans fats (hydrogenated oils).
- Eat plenty of whole grains, plant-based proteins (beans, lentils, and tofu), and fruits and vegetables. Aim for 5 to 9 servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

**Stay active.** Aim for 60 minutes of exercise every day. The best exercise for heart health is aerobic, such as walking, running, swimming, roller blading, and basketball. Join a sports team or be active with friends.

**Don't use tobacco.** Smoking, vaping, or chewing tobacco lowers good cholesterol and harms your health. If you need help quitting, visit [kpdoc.org/quittingtobacco](http://kpdoc.org/quittingtobacco).

## Who should be tested (screened) for cholesterol?

Talk to your doctor about getting tested if your:

- Parents or grandparents had early heart disease.
- Parent or grandparent had a heart attack or stroke before age 55 for men or age 65 for women.
- Parent has high cholesterol (240 mg/dl or higher).

Also get tested if you're older than 10 and have a BMI (body mass index) of more than 85 percent for your age.

## How do I get my cholesterol tested?

Your doctor or other medical professional can order a simple blood test. This test usually reports results as "total cholesterol," but it often gives more information about HDL (or "good" cholesterol) and LDL (or "bad" cholesterol) scores. Basically, you want low scores for both total cholesterol and LDL and higher numbers for HDL.

Here are healthy cholesterol goals:

Lab reading	Goal
Total cholesterol	Less than 240
LDL	Less than 160
HDL	More than 50

## What should I do if I have high cholesterol?

There are many ways to lower your cholesterol. The most important changes you can make are eating healthy and being active. This way, you'll not only feel and look better but also lower your cholesterol and make your heart strong.

### Healthy eating

- Eat fish. Most fish have a special kind of fat that helps lower cholesterol.
- Eat more plant-based proteins (lentils, tofu, and beans). Animal products, even lean meats, are high in saturated fat and can increase your cholesterol.
- Pick fish and lean meats if you eat animal products. Limit red meat.
- Eat foods high in fiber. One serving is equal to a piece of fruit or ½ to 1 cup of vegetables.
- Avoid or limit soda, sports drinks, juice, and sweetened drinks. Having one can of soda is like drinking a candy bar!
- 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. These contain 3 grams of fat or less per serving. Read the label for fat content and serving sizes.
- Talk to your family about choosing low-fat and low-cholesterol meals.

Instead of:	Try:
Store-bought cookies	Homemade cookies (replace butter with canola oil)
Coleslaw	Raw vegetables
Fried chicken	Grilled chicken
Whole milk	Nonfat or a plant-based milk
French fries	Baked potato
Doughnuts	Whole-wheat bagels
Ice cream	Low-fat frozen yogurt

### Activity and exercise

- Choose exercise that's fun and make it part of your routine.
- Limit screen time (phone, TV, computers, and video games) to 1 to 2 hours a day. Swap an hour of screen time for a fun physical activity.

Instead of:	Try:
Using the elevator	Taking stairs
Driving to school	Walking or biking
Hanging out with friends	Playing sports with friends
Sitting around	Jumping rope or dancing

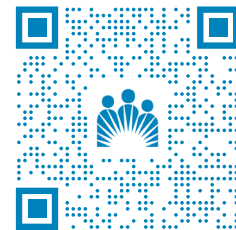
### What if I like fast food?

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 (ketchup and mustard are okay).
- Avoid deep-fried foods like fries, chips, onion rings, tacos, and fried meats (chicken, fish).
- Drink water or 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 without fries. Try a side salad instead.
- Try veggie burgers or veggie hot dogs.

### We're here to help

To learn more about tips for managing your cholesterol, visit [kpdoc.org/teeneatingandexercise](https://kpdoc.org/teeneatingandexercise).



#### HEALTH EDUCATION

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

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