

## Tips for Maintaining Healthy Cholesterol Levels

Cholesterol levels may not be the trendiest wellness topic, but they remain one of the most important indicators of heart health. This fatty substance plays a vital role in body functions, yet when levels become too high or unbalanced, it can silently contribute to serious cardiovascular problems. Because abnormal cholesterol levels often develop without symptoms, regular monitoring is key to early detection and prevention.

This article explains what cholesterol is, how to identify healthy levels and ways to promote heart-healthy habits.

### Understanding Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance found in every cell of the body. It travels through the bloodstream attached to proteins called lipoproteins, which come in two main types:

1. **Low-density lipoprotein (LDL)**—This is often called “bad” cholesterol, because too much of it can lead to plaque buildup in artery walls.
2. **High-density lipoprotein (HDL)**—This is known as “good” cholesterol, because it carries excess cholesterol away from the arteries and back to the liver for disposal.

**Triglycerides** are another type of fat found in the blood. When triglycerides and LDL levels are both high while HDL levels are low, the risk of cardiovascular disease rises sharply.

Think of it as an internal maintenance crew: building cell membranes, producing hormones and helping digest fats. Yet when cholesterol levels drift out of balance, that same crew can start to clog the system rather than keep it running smoothly. Because high cholesterol doesn’t usually cause noticeable symptoms, it can quietly increase the risk of heart attack or stroke, two leading causes of death in working-age adults.

### Healthy Levels

The American Heart Association provides the following general guidelines for adults:

- **Total cholesterol**—Less than 200 mg/dL is desirable. Levels between 200 and 239 mg/dL are considered borderline high, and 240 mg/dL or higher is high.
- **LDL cholesterol**—Less than 100 mg/dL is optimal. Levels of 130–159 mg/dL are borderline high, and 160 mg/dL or higher is high.
- **HDL cholesterol**—60 mg/dL or higher is considered protective against heart disease. Less than 40 mg/dL for men and 50 mg/dL for women is considered low.
- **Triglycerides**—Less than 150 mg/dL is normal. Levels between 150 and 199 mg/dL are borderline high, and 200 mg/dL or higher is high.

Individual goals may vary depending on age, family history or medical conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure.

### How to Measure

A simple lipid panel blood test, typically done at your primary care provider’s office or during an annual wellness visit, reveals total cholesterol, LDL, HDL and triglycerides. You may need to fast for several hours beforehand. Results provide a snapshot of cardiovascular health and can help your doctor determine if lifestyle changes or medication are necessary.

Many organizations offer biometric screenings or annual wellness fairs that include cholesterol checks. These events not only support early detection but also open the door to meaningful conversations about long-term health.

### Tips for Maintaining Healthy Cholesterol

A few small, consistent changes can make a big difference. Consider these evidence-based strategies that benefit employees and the workplace community alike:

- **Prioritize movement.** Even short bursts of activity during the workday can be beneficial. Take a brisk

walk at lunch, use the stairs or stretch between meetings. Regular exercise helps raise HDL levels and lower LDL levels.

- **Choose heart-friendly foods.** Swap saturated fats for healthier options like olive oil, nuts, seeds and avocados. Incorporate more fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins into meals.
- **Reduce trans fats.** These are found in many processed or fried foods and can significantly increase LDL levels. Reading nutrition labels can really pay off.
- **Quit smoking.** Smoking lowers HDL and damages blood vessels. Tobacco cessation programs, often covered by employers, can help individuals succeed.
- **Limit alcohol and manage stress.** Moderate alcohol consumption (if at all) and stress-reduction practices, such as mindfulness, breathing exercises or short breaks, improve overall heart health. Taking time to recharge, whether through a quick walk, stretching or deep breathing, can make a noticeable difference in your well-being throughout the day.
- **Know your numbers and recheck them regularly.** Most adults should have their cholesterol tested at least every four to six years, or more frequently if advised by a doctor. Use health reminders, such as open enrollment or annual checkups, as prompts to schedule your next screening and stay on top of your results.
- **Discuss cholesterol with your primary care provider.** They can order and interpret lipid panels and recommend next steps, which may include targeted lifestyle changes, referrals or medication, when appropriate. Getting your annual physical, which is typically covered under preventive care at no cost under most health insurance, is a great starting point.

When you take steps to care for your health, you help build a workplace culture that values balance and vitality.

## Conclusion

Cholesterol management isn't just about avoiding disease; it's about maintaining the energy, focus and vitality needed to perform well at work and enjoy life outside it. Taking small steps, such as scheduling regular screenings, eating balanced meals and staying active, helps you protect your heart health and overall well-being. When you make heart-healthy choices, you'll feel the difference: increased energy, sharper focus and greater stamina throughout your day.

If your latest checkup revealed high cholesterol, or if it's been a while since your last test, don't wait for symptoms to appear. Talk with your primary care provider about your results, risk factors and any necessary lifestyle changes.