Cholesterol: 4 Numbers You Absolutely Must Know

Knowing your cholesterol levels can help you prevent major health issues like heart attack and stroke. Here’s what the numbers mean:

**Total Cholesterol**
- Below 200 mg/dL: Desirable
- 200-239 mg/dL: Borderline high
- 240 mg/dL and above: High

**HDL Cholesterol**
- Below 40 mg/dL (men): Poor
- 40-49 mg/dL (men): Better
- 50-59 mg/dL (women): Better
- 60 mg/dL and above: Best

**LDL Cholesterol**
- Below 70 mg/dL: Ideal for people at very high risk of heart disease
- Below 100 mg/dL: Ideal for people at high risk of heart disease
- 100-129 mg/dL: Near ideal
- 130-159 mg/dL: Borderline high
- 160-189 mg/dL: High
- 190 mg/dL and above: Very high

**Triglyceride Level**
- Below 150 mg/dL: Desirable
- 150-199 mg/dL: Borderline high
- 200-499 mg/dL: High
- 500 mg/dL and above: Very high

Source: Mayo Clinic

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance in your cells and bloodstream, and it has many important functions. But too much can be downright dangerous. High cholesterol can clog your arteries. If your arteries become clogged, blood can’t flow through your body properly, which can cause serious conditions like a heart attack or stroke. Because of these dangers—and no matter how old you are—it’s critical to know your cholesterol numbers.

If your numbers don’t fall in the ideal range, discuss strategies for lowering your LDL and triglycerides and increasing your HDL with a health care professional. For many people, lifestyle changes such as eating better, losing weight and exercising are enough to lower cholesterol. Read on to learn more.

Yours in good health,

Dr. David Hunnicutt
Executive Editor
Even if you think you don’t have time for breakfast, there are many quick and simple options that can be ready in seconds—and this recipe is a prime example. Make this granola on a Sunday night and store the servings in individual baggies. Come Monday morning, simply grab-and-go for a healthy start to your work week!

**INGREDIENTS:**
- 5 cups of old-fashioned oats
- 1 ½ cups of walnuts, pine nuts and pecans; chopped coarsely
- 1 cup shredded coconut (optional)
- 1 ½ cups of dried fruit of choice (raisins, apricots, cranberries, etc)
- ½ cup of molasses
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 3 tsp cinnamon
- ⅛ cup canola oil

**INSTRUCTIONS:**
Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. Place the dry ingredients in a large mixing bowl and stir until thoroughly combined. Add the molasses, oil, and vanilla and stir until the dry ingredients are evenly coated. Spread the mixture evenly on a baking sheet with sides and bake at 325 degrees until light brown and toasted (about 25-30 minutes). For even cooking, carefully stir the granola mixture every 10 minutes. Remove the granola from the oven and allow it to cool. It will become crunchier as it cools down. Store the granola in an airtight container at room temperature or in the freezer in a freezer-safe bag.

**SERVINGS:** Makes about eight cups. One serving is ⅔ of a cup.

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**PACK SOME PROTEIN POWER**
This granola is delicious with plain, Greek style yogurt (an excellent protein source).
For an extra nutritional boost, add fresh or frozen berries. Yum!

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**Eating Out? Be Mindful of the Menu**
You can still grab a nutritious breakfast if you’re eating out, but always avoid menu items titled “grand,” “monster” or “lumberjack.” If a restaurant item is named for its giant size, it’s a sure bet it won’t be healthy!

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**Dr. Ann**
With formal training in nutrition and medicine, plus hands-on experience as a mother of four and family physician, Dr. Ann is a unique nutrition expert for the real world.

The whole food ingredients found in Dr. Ann’s recipes are the right foods for health and vitality. Nutritional excellence naturally follows.

For more, visit [DrAnnWellness.com](http://DrAnnWellness.com).
There are several important reasons to eat breakfast, but did you know that one of them includes losing weight? Believe it or not, eating a healthy breakfast every day will help you to lose weight and keep that weight off. According to participants in the National Weight Control Registry (the nation's largest database for long-term weight loss), and studies in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association, there is ample evidence to back this finding.

**Why Your Morning Meal Matters**

Although you might think that you can cut calories and lose weight by skipping breakfast, according to researchers, this may not be your best choice. Here’s why. By mid-morning and lunch, breakfast-skippers are usually starved and replace calories during the day with mindless snacking or binge eating. Because of that, it’s recommended that you eat a healthy breakfast every single day.

**Making The Perfect Breakfast—Four Great Options**

Eating a healthy breakfast (as opposed to one that contains donuts or sugary cereal) is the key. The ideal healthy breakfast has three components: (1) a whole grain for healthy carbohydrates, (2) a low-fat dairy or high-calcium food for protein and (3) a fruit or vegetable for vitamins, minerals and fiber. There are countless options that fit the bill, but here are just a few ideas to get you started:

**Option 1:** High-fiber multi-grain cereal with low-fat milk and fresh fruit. Healthy breakfast cereal is a quick and nutritious way to start your day. In fact, a recent government-funded study found that those who ate (healthy) cereals regularly had fewer weight problems than infrequent cereal eaters.

**Option 2:** Oatmeal with fruit and cinnamon and a cup of low-fat milk. Opt for steel cut oats or rolled oats as the whole grains provide just the right amount of carbs to fuel your muscles and brain for the entire morning. Cinnamon and fruit add flavor as well as a nutritional boost.

**Option 3:** Plain nonfat yogurt with fresh berries and a slice of whole wheat toast. Plain, nonfat yogurt offers a lot of protein for few calories (most single-serving yogurts are around 100 calories).

Protein is essential, as it satisfies hunger and helps curb your appetite.

**Option 4:** Eggs, whole wheat toast and fresh fruit. Science has proven those who start their day with poached, boiled or scrambled eggs can lose up to two-thirds more weight than others. Eggs make you feel more full for longer when compared to many other foods. Add fruit or veggies and a whole grain side to complete a perfect breakfast.

**SUPERSTAR FOOD OF THE MONTH: Berries!**

All berries are full of antioxidant polyphenols, which work magic in the cells lining our arteries. Berries deliver several other heart-healthy agents including fiber, vitamin C, folate and potassium. And (as if you needed another reason to love this delicious fruit), a recent study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that those who ate a handful of berries twice a day experienced several cardiovascular benefits like lower blood pressure and an increase in good (HDL) cholesterol levels.
Make a list of your nearby Urgent Care facilities. For non life-threatening conditions, an in-network Urgent Care center can save you hundreds (compared to the ER).

2. **Switch to generics.** If, for example, you’re taking three brand name prescription medications and switch to the generic form, you can save about $4,500 a year.

3. **Ask about price and cash discounts.** If you ask about cash discounts, chances are you’ll get one. Many health care providers offer up to a 20% discount for paying the bill in cash.

4. **Consider mail-order medications.** Most large drugstore chains offer mail-order services that can provide a three-month supply of meds for the same price as a one-month supply at a local pharmacy.

5. **Ask your doctor about changing your dosage.** If you take a 20 mg pill twice a day, ask your doctor if you can instead take a 40 mg pill once a day. This lowers the number of pills you need to buy and could save you hundreds in a typical year. (*Seek professional advice because not all medications can be altered.*)

6. **Ask for samples.** Doctor’s offices are usually filled with sample medications, and you can save hundreds by simply asking for one.

7. **Double check your medical bills.** According to Medical Billing Advocates of America, 80% of doctor and hospital bills contain errors. Review your bills to ensure you’re only charged for the services actually performed.

8. **Shop around.** Different health care facilities charge different prices. For example, an in-network MRI at a hospital costs around $1,145, while an MRI at an independent radiology facility costs around $560.
Wash your hands. Americans spend lots on cold and flu remedies, but the best preventive medicine is soap and water. Scrub your hands for 20 seconds before eating and after using a rest room or being in contact with someone who's sick.

Get screened every year. Annual checkups and preventive screenings are essential to protecting your health and can save you big in the long run. Most insurance plans cover well visits and preventive checks.

Get a flu shot. It's not fun to waste your vacation days or sick pay when you get the flu. Protect yourself with a flu shot every year for around $25.

Cash-in on rebates. Some major drugstore chains offer rebate programs that give you cash back on various pain relievers, vitamins, skin-care products and other goods. One example is riteaid.rebateplus.com.

Visit a dental school. Many dental schools offer low-cost dental care performed by students who are supervised by the faculty. Call a nearby university to see if any discounted services are available.

Get a loyalty card. Many pharmacies offer loyalty programs in which you can receive rewards and discounts for your purchases.

Look closely at your health care plan. Your health plan may offer valuable extras like discounts on gym memberships or weight-loss programs. Visit your plan's website or ask your benefits coordinator.

Expand your vision. You don't have to buy expensive glasses or contacts from your optometrist. Federal law requires them to give you a copy of your prescription so you can buy lenses anywhere you like.

Does your brand name drug have a generic equivalent? Google "drugs@FDA" for a catalog of FDA-approved drug products and label information.
The moment you get active, you reap the benefits.

You may know that exercise is good for you, but did you know that its health benefits begin the very moment you take your first step? That’s right. With one step, a whopping 200+ muscles including your large leg muscles and abdominals contract to keep you balanced. Taking that first step tells your body to fire up the engines that burn fuel in the form of calories. Keep taking steps, and you’ll begin to feel better as your heart and lungs flush away carbon dioxide and increase your oxygen intake. Even small amounts of physical activity offer significant and immediate benefits—check out what the recent research reveals:

Exercise puts you in a good mood.

Physical activity can improve your mood right away. How? The moment you get moving, your body increases its production of “feel good” chemicals such as dopamine and serotonin, both of which are associated with feelings of pleasure and mood stabilization.

It lowers your blood pressure.

Believe it or not, just one bout of physical activity can have a positive effect on your blood pressure. Of course, to sustain long-term benefits, you need to exercise on a regular basis—but remember the benefits last only as long as you continue to exercise.

It increases your HDL-cholesterol.

An increase in HDL cholesterol is good! HDL cholesterol gets rid of free radicals in the blood, which are associated with atherosclerosis (the fatty white substance that clogs your arteries).
**Gains**

**It improves your pain tolerance.** A recent study conducted at the Cleveland Clinic Chronic Pain Rehabilitation Program took various measurements of participants before and after they took a 10-minute walk on a treadmill. They found that these brief sessions immediately improved participants’ mood and perception of pain and exertion.

**It can save your life.** Perhaps best of all, studies definitively show that even light or moderate intensity physical activity like walking or cycling can substantially reduce the risk of early death. Now, that’s definitely worth getting out of your chair for.

**More Info:** Check out the CDC’s physical activity recommendations [www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines](http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines)

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**Stand Up!**

When you sit for more than an hour at a time, chemical and biological changes start to occur within your body—and these changes can be harmful to your health.

The good news is that you can counteract the negative effects of sitting by standing up for a few minutes every hour (or better yet, every 20 minutes). In fact, each time you stand, you send a message to the brain to prepare for movement, which increases blood flow to the muscles and improves your body’s oxygen consumption.

**Take a Stand**

Engage your muscles and get your blood pumping in the following ways:

- Stand while talking on the phone
- Stand and stretch at your desk
- Eat lunch standing up

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**How Much, How Long & How Often?**

**Tick…tick…tick…**

There are 168 hours in a week and you only need 2.5 of those hours to reap the health benefits of exercise. For health benefits, it’s recommended that you do moderate-intensity physical activity (i.e., brisk walking) for 30 minutes a day, five days a week.

If 30 consecutive minutes a day seems like a lot of time, try to incorporate just 10 or 20 minutes a day. Take the stairs whenever you can or park your car farther away from your office.

**But don’t forget…**

More health benefits come with more physical activity, so the more exercise you can incorporate into your daily routine, the better!

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Spark16 is designed to help you, but is not intended as a substitute for medical advice. If you have concerns about a health issue, it’s important that you talk with your doctor.
It's Easy To Get Cholesterol: 4 Numbers You Absolutely Must Know

1. Your LDL. Low-density lipoproteins (LDL) or “bad” cholesterol.
2. Your HDL. High-density lipoproteins (HDL) or “good” cholesterol.
3. Your triglycerides.
4. Your total cholesterol.

The Magic Number:
- Your LDL should be under 100—and maybe under 70.
- Your HDL should be 60 or above.
- Your triglycerides should be below 150.
- Your total cholesterol should be below 200.

Believe it or not, there are no signs or symptoms of high cholesterol, which only underscores the importance of getting it checked. To test your cholesterol levels, you need to see a doctor or health care professional who can administer a simple blood test.

The American Heart Association encourages all adults age 20 or older to get a fasting lipoprotein profile—which measures total cholesterol, LDL, HDL and triglycerides—once every five years.

Cholesterol testing is frequently done as part of an annual physical, which is often covered by health insurance. Call the number or visit the website on the back of your insurance card to find out what your plan covers. Some walk-in clinics also provide cholesterol testing for around $50 to $100.