



# CHOLESTEROL

**S**hrimp is full of cholesterol. But the real cholesterol danger lurks in the slyly packaged “cholesterol-free” cookie. You see, shrimp contains very little of the saturated fat that makes that cookie taste so good. And it’s the *saturated fat* in food—not the cholesterol—that has the greatest effect on your cholesterol level.

No wonder people are confused.

Here’s your guide to understanding what it all means, because what *is* clear is the link between high cholesterol in your blood and heart disease. You’ll find out whether you need a cholesterol test and what “good” cholesterol is, along with quick tips for creating a heart-healthy diet. What you won’t find is a recipe for those cookies.

## CHOLESTEROL AND YOUR HEART

Cholesterol, a white, waxy fat found naturally in your body, is used to build cell walls and make certain hormones. Too much of it, though, can clog your arteries and eventually choke off the supply of blood to the heart, which is the reason high cholesterol is a leading risk factor for heart disease. Other factors that put you at risk include:

- high blood pressure
- smoking
- a family history of heart disease
- being male
- diabetes
- obesity

## PUTTING CHOLESTEROL TO THE TEST

**WHO SHOULD BE TESTED:** Everyone aged 20 and older, according to the National Cholesterol Education Program, although some researchers and medical economists believe this may be overcautious. Their advice: Men with no risk factors can wait until age 35 to be tested; similar women, until age 45.

**WHEN:** Once every five years.

**BY WHOM:** Preferably your doctor, who can measure LDL as well as total cholesterol. If you use an outside service:

- Check to see that the testers are doctors, nurses, or medical technicians.
- Get a written copy of your results to show to your doctor.

**WHAT IT MEANS:** The test measures the total amount of cholesterol in your blood: the HDL or “good” cholesterol, which cleanses arteries; plus the LDL or “bad” cholesterol, which builds up and clogs arteries. Here are guidelines for reading your test results.

Risk	Total Cholesterol	LDL	HDL
HIGH	above 239	above 159	less than 35
BORDERLINE	200-239	130-159	n/a
DESIRABLE	below 200	below 130	above 60

**NOTE:** If your cholesterol level places you in the borderline group and you have two or more of the risk factors listed at left, you’re actually at *high* risk for heart disease.



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### EXERCISE

Thirty minutes of aerobic exercise three or four times a week may be all you need to raise the level of beneficial HDL in your bloodstream. Working out also helps control weight, lower blood pressure, and reduce stress. Suggestions: *Brisk walking, running, swimming, cycling, dancing, jumping rope, skating, aerobics.*

### CHANGE THE FAT CONTENT OF YOUR MEALS

Following a low-fat, low-cholesterol diet can usually reduce your blood cholesterol by about 10 to 15 percent, thus lowering your risk of heart disease by 20 to 30 percent. Individual results will vary, depending on genetic makeup and former eating habits.

1. REDUCE SATURATED FAT, which raises the level of harmful LDL cholesterol in your blood (*butter, whole milk, cheese, ice cream, red meat, palm oil, palm kernel oil, coconut oil, hydrogenated soybean and cottonseed oils*).

- Cut out meat products high in fat (*hamburger, bacon, sausage*).
- Read labels carefully, and beware of foods that contain large amounts of hydrogenated vegetable oils, cocoa butter, coconut and palm oils, beef fat, or lard.
- Remove the skin from poultry, trim the fat around meat, and use lean beef, pork, or veal.
- Prepare at least one meatless meal a week.
- Snack on pretzels, air-popped popcorn, and fruit instead of candy, nuts, and chips.
- Drink skim or low-fat milk, and be aware that cream substitutes are made with tropical oils.
- Eat low-fat cheese, such as part-skim mozzarella.

2. REDUCE CHOLESTEROL (*eggs, meats, butter, whole milk*).

- Cook with egg whites instead of whole eggs.
- Avoid commercially prepared cookies, cakes, and pies.
- Limit portion sizes of lean meat, fish, and poultry to no more than six ounces a day, or about the size of two decks of cards.
- Eliminate organ meats (*liver, brain, kidney*) from your diet.
- Eat more water-soluble fiber, such as oat bran, legumes, and fruit, which may help lower cholesterol levels when made part of a low-fat, low-cholesterol diet.

3. EAT UNSATURATED FATS. Polyunsaturates lower your total blood cholesterol level—both LDL and HDL (*corn oil, sunflower seed oil, safflower oil*). Monounsaturates lower LDL levels but leave the beneficial HDL intact (*olive oil, canola oil*).

- Cook and bake with vegetable oils such as canola, sunflower, corn, soybean, and olive.
- Make your own salad dressing.
- Use soft margarine.

Kind of Fat	Saturated	Poly	Mono
Canola oil	6	32	62
Safflower oil	10	77	13
Sunflower oil	11	69	20
Corn oil	13	62	25
Olive oil	14	9	77
Soybean oil	15	61	24
Margarine (tub)	17	34	24
Peanut oil	18	33	49
Cottonseed oil	27	54	19
Chicken fat	31	22	47
Lard	41	12	47
Beef fat	52	4	44
Palm kernel oil	81	2	11
Coconut oil	92	2	6

Source: *Compositions of Foods*, U.S. Department of Agriculture