

# Information Guide to **Cholesterol**



*Fighting Heart Disease & Stroke*

## Understanding cholesterol

Cholesterol is a type of fat found in your blood. Everyone needs a certain amount of cholesterol to stay healthy, however when it becomes too high it becomes a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke.

There are two types of cholesterol: LDL 'bad' and HDL 'good'. Too much of the bad cholesterol can clog your arteries which can lead to a heart attack or stroke.

## What are the recommended targets for cholesterol?\*

|                               |                                            |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| <b>Total Cholesterol</b>      | < 5mmol/L                                  |
| <b>LDL (bad) Cholesterol</b>  | < 3mmol/L                                  |
| <b>HDL (good) Cholesterol</b> | > 1mmol/L (males)<br>> 1.2mmol/L (females) |
| <b>Triglycerides</b>          | < 1.7mmol/L                                |

## Specific target levels

Depending on what other risk factors that you may have your doctor may recommend lower targets for you. For example if you have a history of heart disease or stroke, or have diabetes, your recommended target levels will be lower: Total Cholesterol < 4.5 mmol/L and LDL < 1.4mmol/L\*.

Overall, the lower your LDL cholesterol is the better, as this will reduce your cardiovascular risk.

*\*European Society of Cardiology Guidelines for the Management of Dyslipidaemias 2019*



## What causes high cholesterol?

---

Unhealthy lifestyle behaviours contribute to high cholesterol. These include:

- Unhealthy diet
- Physical inactivity
- Smoking/Tobacco smoke exposure
- Excess weight

Raised cholesterol can also run in the family through an inherited condition called **Familial Hypercholesterolemia** (FH). People with FH cannot remove excess cholesterol from the liver as effectively as people without FH. As such, those with FH need to take medications to lower their cholesterol, while also making positive healthy lifestyle changes.

## Who should have their cholesterol measured?

---

Everyone should have their cholesterol measured as high cholesterol generally does not cause any symptoms. This is especially important if you have a family history of heart disease or high cholesterol, or have any other risk factors such as high blood pressure, excess weight or you smoke. People who have diabetes or have a history of heart disease or stroke should have their cholesterol checked on a regular basis.

## What about medications?

---

Target cholesterol levels can be reached through healthy lifestyle changes, however some people will need to take medication in addition to dietary and lifestyle modifications.



## Top tips to lower cholesterol

---

- **Diet:**

- » Reduce your intake of saturated and trans fat (butter, full fat dairy products, red meat and fatty cuts of meat, processed meat, biscuits, cakes, pastries, takeaways and ready-made meals).
- » Replace saturated and trans fat with monounsaturated and polyunsaturated (omega-3) fats which can be found in oily fish, dark green leafy vegetables, rapeseed oil, flaxseed/linseed and nuts. These can lower your triglyceride levels and prevent blood clotting.

- **Weight:** Reducing excess body weight can lower cholesterol by 5-10%.
- **Exercise:** Aim for a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic activity per week. Go for a brisk 30 minute walk 5 days per week. Exercise increases your HDL 'good' cholesterol and can reduce your triglyceride levels.
- **Smoking:** If you smoke, stop! Smoking lowers your levels of HDL 'good' cholesterol. See [www.quit.ie](http://www.quit.ie) for more information.
- **Alcohol:** Excess consumption can increase triglyceride levels and lead to weight gain. Limit alcohol intake to less than 11 standard drinks for women and 17 standard drinks for men.



For more health information or to support the work at Croí, the Heart & Stroke Charity, please visit our website at **[www.croi.ie](http://www.croi.ie)**.

### **Croí, the Heart & Stroke Charity**

Moyola Lane, Newcastle, Galway, H91 FF68  
091-332999 | [healthteam@croi.ie](mailto:healthteam@croi.ie) | [www.croi.ie](http://www.croi.ie)



@croiheartstroke