

IS YOUR CHOLESTEROL IN CHECK?

Your blood carries all the materials your cells need to survive. Among them is cholesterol—often referred to as “fat”—which our bodies need to form healthy cells and tissues.

“The liver makes cholesterol needed for normal body function,” explains Robert LoNigro, M.D., M.S., Tufts Health Plan medical director for care management. “We also get cholesterol from the food we eat.

“It’s important to keep cholesterol in check, because when there is too much cholesterol in our bloodstream, it can lead to the buildup of cholesterol in the arteries of the heart, blocking the flow of blood to the heart. This is coronary heart disease.”

What’s a healthy number?

When your doctor checks cholesterol, he uses a test called a lipid panel, which measures the total cholesterol and other fats in the blood.

“There is no clear point between healthy or unhealthy levels,” says Dr. LoNigro. “Ideally, however, total cholesterol should be below 200 milligrams per deciliter. Check with your doctor about what is right for you.”


The lipid panel test also looks at two types of cholesterol—LDL, the so-called bad cholesterol, and HDL, “good” cholesterol. LDL clogs arteries by delivering cholesterol to the cells and depositing it in the artery wall. HDL helps clear cholesterol from the blood by taking it from the cells to the liver for disposal.

If you need to control your cholesterol

“People who need to control their cholesterol often do so with healthy lifestyle changes and/or help from their doctor,” says Dr. LoNigro.

“Lifestyle changes may include quitting smoking, eating a heart-healthy low-fat diet, and staying active and exercising regularly. If necessary, medications can be used to bring cholesterol under control.”

Discover more at www.tuftshealthplan.com

 To learn more about cholesterol and how to keep it in check, visit www.tuftshealthplan.com/members.

- Click on Health Information and Tools and look for the Cool Interactive Tools link to:
 - Take a quiz to learn your cholesterol IQ.
 - Access the Caremark Heart Health Self-Care Center to learn how you can protect your heart.

- Learn more about cholesterol tests and ways to watch your cholesterol.
- Find out how to improve your cholesterol levels, if you need to.
- Access the Healthwise® Knowledgebase, an online health encyclopedia, to:
 - Learn about cholesterol, what causes high cholesterol, how it is diagnosed and treated, medical tests to measure cholesterol, coronary artery disease, and more.
- Go to Health Programs and find the link to reference materials developed by the Massachusetts Health Quality Partners (MHQP):
 - Access the MHQP’s 2005 Adult Preventive Care Guidelines to learn how you can work with your doctor to monitor your cholesterol levels.

