



DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Managing Cholesterol

To make sure your cardiovascular risk is as low as possible, you and your doctor will need to work together to optimize your cholesterol levels. Asking the right questions during your conversation will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate your condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

Atherosclerosis	Also known as “hardening of the arteries,” atherosclerosis is a chronic, progressive disease in which plaques build up in the walls of the arteries. These plaques can eventually rupture, interrupting blood flow to vital organs such as the heart and brain, causing heart attacks and strokes. The reason doctors worry about cholesterol is that abnormal cholesterol levels can accelerate atherosclerosis.
Lipids	Lipids are organic compounds that are not soluble in water. When doctors say “lipids,” they are generally referring to organic fats, in particular, to cholesterol and triglycerides.
Cholesterol	Cholesterol is a lipid used by the body for many vital functions, including building cell membranes and making important hormones. However, when blood cholesterol levels become abnormal, atherosclerosis tends to worsen more rapidly.
Lipoproteins	Lipoproteins are large complexes, consisting of proteins and lipids, that circulate in the bloodstream. Their chief function is to transport various lipids throughout the body.
HDL Cholesterol	Cholesterol in the blood that is carried by high-density lipoprotein is called HDL cholesterol. This lipoprotein removes excess cholesterol from the blood vessel walls, so higher HDL levels tend to correlate with a reduced risk of atherosclerosis. For this reason, HDL cholesterol is often called “good cholesterol.”
LDL Cholesterol	Cholesterol in the blood that is carried by low-density lipoprotein is called LDL cholesterol. The low-density lipoprotein can deposit cholesterol in the blood vessel walls, so higher LDL cholesterol levels correlate with accelerated atherosclerosis. This is why LDL cholesterol is often called “bad cholesterol.” When your doctor is worried about your cholesterol levels, it is almost always the LDL cholesterol levels that cause the concern.
Triglycerides	Fat is stored in the body in the form of triglycerides, making triglycerides (consisting of three fatty acid groups attached to glycerol), the most common type of lipid found in the body. High triglyceride blood levels are also associated with an increased cardiovascular risk.

Questions to Ask

These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about how to best manage your cholesterol.

About Symptoms

- I understand that high cholesterol itself does not cause symptoms, but what symptoms should I watch out for that might indicate atherosclerosis?

About Causes & Risk Factors

- In addition to cholesterol levels, what are my other risk factors for developing cardiovascular disease?
- Taking all my risk factors into account, how high is my total risk of developing cardiovascular disease over the next 10 years?

About Diagnosis

- Can you review with me all the numbers reported on my blood lipid panel, and tell me what each of them mean?
- Is there any indication that my abnormal blood lipid levels may be related to a genetic condition?
- Should I have an evaluation to screen for atherosclerosis that might already be present?

About Treatment

- What kind of diet or exercise program should I be on to reduce my cholesterol levels and my overall risk?
- Will lifestyle modifications be enough for me, or should I take a statin or non-statin cholesterol drug? If so, can you help me understand the difference, potential side effects, and how I can minimize them?
- How can I raise my HDL (“good cholesterol”) levels?
- Do I also need treatment to reduce my triglyceride blood levels?
- How is my blood pressure? Should I be using a home blood pressure monitor to keep track of it?
- Have we optimized my treatment for diabetes or prediabetes?
