



American Heart Association®
Reduce Your Risk™



LDL Cholesterol: Myths Vs. Facts

Myth: If your health care professional hasn't mentioned your LDL (bad) cholesterol number, you're OK.

Fact: You need to take charge of your health. A 2023 survey from the American Heart Association with The Harris Poll revealed nearly half (47%) of heart attack and stroke survivors don't know their LDL number. If you're a survivor, it is especially important to get your LDL cholesterol tested regularly and take any cholesterol-lowering medications as prescribed. Work with your health care professional to create a plan to lower your LDL including regular testing and follow-up appointments to make sure it's working.

- **Healthy adults age 20-39 years old**, should have their cholesterol checked every four to six years. Ask your health care professional to conduct a cholesterol test, assess your your lifetime risk and determine your risk for heart attack or stroke.
- **Adults over age 40, or those who have other risk factors**, may need their cholesterol checked more often. Ask your health care professional to conduct a cholesterol test, assess your 10-year risk and determine your risk for heart attack or stroke.

Myth: Diet and physical activity are enough to lower my LDL.

Fact: Diet and lifestyle changes may not be enough if you've had a previous heart attack or stroke. If you and your health care professional decide together that you need to take medicine to reduce high LDL ("bad") cholesterol, it's important to take your medicines exactly as they're prescribed to reduce your risk for another heart attack or stroke.

Diet and physical activity affect your LDL cholesterol number, but they are not the only factors. Age, race and ethnicity, sex, being overweight or obese, tobacco and exposure of secondhand smoke, and heavy alcohol drinking, also may cause your LDL cholesterol number to rise. Some people are born with high LDL cholesterol that they've inherited from their parents. Regardless, it's important to know your number, as too much LDL cholesterol can increase your risk for heart attack or stroke. Talk to your health care professional about the right treatment plan for you.

Myth: Having high LDL cholesterol is only a man's problem.

Fact: Both men and women tend to have higher LDL cholesterol numbers as they get older. Although atherosclerosis typically occurs later in women than in men, cardiovascular disease remains the leading cause of death in women. Health care professionals should consider women specific conditions, such as premature menopause (less than age 40) and pregnancy associated conditions, when discussing LDL cholesterol numbers and potential treatment options.

Myth: You don't need your LDL (bad) cholesterol checked until you've reached middle age.

Fact: Adults over age 40, or those who have heart disease (including prior heart attack or stroke) or other risk factors, may need their cholesterol checked frequently. Talk to your health care professional about the right frequency of testing. For those who risk is low, the American Heart Association (AHA) recommends all adults 20-39 years old should have their LDL cholesterol checked every four to six years.

Learn more at heart.org/LDL

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