

High cholesterol risk factors


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What are the risk factors for high cholesterol?

There are many risk factors for high cholesterol. It is important to look at your lifestyle and any underlying conditions you may have.


Are you at risk?¹

Lifestyle




- An unhealthy diet
- Lack of physical activity or exercise
- Obesity
- Smoking
- Excessive alcohol consumption

Underlying health conditions



- **High blood pressure**
- **Diabetes**
- Kidney disease
- Liver disease

Other factors



- **A family history of early heart attack or stroke** – If you have male family members below 55 years or female family members below 65 years with heart attack or stroke, you may have a higher chance of getting heart attack or stroke
- **A family history of a cholesterol-related condition, ie, familial hypercholesterolaemia** – Familial hypercholesterolaemia is caused by an inherited gene alteration. People with this condition have high cholesterol from birth
- **Age** – As you grow older, the chances of getting atherosclerosis is higher
- **Sex** – Males are more likely to have high cholesterol than females

How can I tell if I have high cholesterol?



High cholesterol usually has no symptoms. A blood test assessing your lipid profile is the only way to detect high cholesterol.²

People with rare lipid disorders may present symptoms such as bumps on the skin, hand or feet. These symptoms are commonly caused by a deposition of extra cholesterol and other types of fats.³

When to screen for high cholesterol?



If you are above 20 years old, it is recommended to check your cholesterol. If your test results are normal, your doctor may recommend having follow-up screening tests every 5 years. If your test results are abnormal, your doctor may recommend more frequent measurements. Your doctor may also suggest more frequent tests if you have the risk factors for high cholesterol.²

Read more on how to interpret your test results [here](#).


What is the link between smoking and high cholesterol?



Smoking or inhaling cigarette smoke (second hand smoke) increases the risk of heart and lung diseases in patients who have high cholesterol, [high blood pressure](#) and/or [diabetes](#). Smoking lowers the high-density lipoprotein cholesterol, injures the lining of blood vessels and increases the risk of developing atherosclerosis.⁴ It is highly beneficial to [quit smoking](#) to improve your general health.

What is the link between diabetes and high cholesterol?

If you have [diabetes](#), you need to be even more careful about controlling your cholesterol levels. Diabetes and high cholesterol double your risk of heart disease and stroke. According to the American Diabetes Association guidelines, patients with diabetes have to reach much lower cholesterol targets than those without diabetes.⁵



Cholesterol targets for people with diabetes⁵:

- **LDL levels:** <2.6 mmol/L
- **HDL levels:** >1.0 mmol/L (men) or >1.39 mmol/L (women)
- **Triglyceride levels:** <3.9 mmol/L

References

1. NHS choices. High cholesterol-causes. Available at <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cholesterol/pages/causes.aspx>. Accessed 19 September, 2019.
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3. WebMD. High cholesterol-symptoms. Available at <http://www.webmd.com/cholesterol-management/tc/high-cholesterol-symptoms>. Accessed 19 September, 2019.
4. WebMD. Smoking and high cholesterol. Available at <http://www.webmd.com/cholesterol-management/smoking-and-high-cholesterol>. Accessed 19 September, 2019.
5. Solano MP, Goldberg RB. *Clin diabetes* 2006;24:27–32.