

The healthy heart challenge



Cholesterol and blood pressure – Learn the fast facts

High cholesterol and blood pressure are major risk factors for heart disease and stroke. By addressing each, you can better manage your heart health. The sooner you start, the sooner your heart will thank you!

Cholesterol fast facts

- Having high blood cholesterol puts you at risk for heart disease.
- People with high cholesterol have about twice the risk of heart disease as people with lower levels.
- Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance. Your body needs some cholesterol, but it can build up on the walls of your arteries and lead to heart disease and stroke when you have too much in your blood.
- Lowering your cholesterol can reduce your risk of having a heart attack, needing heart bypass surgery or angioplasty, and dying of heart disease.
- Exercising, eating a healthy diet, and not smoking will help you prevent high cholesterol and reduce your cholesterol levels.
- High cholesterol has no symptoms, so many people don't know that their cholesterol is too high. Your doctor can do a simple blood test to check your levels.

Blood Pressure Fast Facts

- High blood pressure increases the heart's workload, causing the heart muscle to thicken and become stiffer. Over time, high blood pressure can also cause a build-up of plaque inside the arteries.
- If high blood pressure exists with obesity, smoking, high cholesterol levels, or diabetes, the risk of heart attack or stroke increases even more.
- High blood pressure usually has no warning signs or symptoms, so you may not realize you have it.
- Blood pressure is measured using two numbers:
 - **Systolic blood pressure**, which represents the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart beats
 - **Diastolic blood pressure**, which represents the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart rests between beats.
- Normal blood pressure is a reading of less than 120 mmHg/80 mmHg.

For additional information, visit the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's websites:

- <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/coronary-heart-disease>
- <https://nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/heart-healthy-living>

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