

We are writing to you today because you have recently had a blood test which checked your cholesterol levels. Cholesterol is a proven risk factor for heart disease and stroke. There are different types of cholesterol and some can be beneficial. However a certain type( called LDL) is harmful. In general, the higher your LDL cholesterol, the greater your risk of heart disease or stroke.

When we received your cholesterol test result we used the levels to calculate the risk of you suffering from heart disease or stroke in the next 10 years. Amongst other things, this calculation took into account the levels of your different types of cholesterol, your age, sex, blood pressure and smoking status. **We have calculated your risk of heart disease or stroke in the next ten years to be between 10 and 20%.** In effect, if you had 10 identical twins, 2 of them would have a stroke or heart disease in the next 10 years.

### **What can I do to reduce this risk?**

Reducing your cholesterol, whatever the level is currently, will help to reduce the risk of having a stroke or heart disease. Reducing your blood pressure (if it is high), stopping smoking, increasing exercise and being a healthy weight are also things you can do to help

### **How do I reduce my cholesterol**

Eating a healthy diet and doing regular exercise can help lower the level of cholesterol in your blood.  
**See the enclosed diet advice sheet**

### **Do I need medication?**

There is national guidance from the National Institute for health and Care Excellence (NICE) stating that patients with a stroke/heart disease risk between 10 and 20% should be offered cholesterol lower medication (also called statins). Previously this was only offered to patients with extremely high cholesterol or a risk over 20%. There is good evidence that taking statins lowers your risk of heart disease/stroke if you have a risk of 20%. There is also some evidence that this may be effective for patients, like you, with a risk between 10 and 20%. If you would like to discuss starting medication please make a routine appointment (this can be over the phone) with your usual GP.

### **Do I need to check my cholesterol again?**

With your level of risk we would advise that you have your cholesterol checked again in 5 years time. If you make changes to your diet and would like to see the effect that this has had of your cholesterol then please request another test in 6-12 months. If you are started on a cholesterol lowering medication then you will require an earlier blood test

### **Further online information**

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/high-cholesterol/>

<https://patient.info/health/high-cholesterol>

# Fats and cholesterol

## Saturated and unsaturated fat

There are 2 main types of fat: saturated and unsaturated. Eating too many foods high in saturated fat can raise the level of cholesterol in your blood.

Most people in the UK eat too much saturated fat.

Foods high in saturated fat include:

- meat pies
- sausages and fatty cuts of meat
- butter, ghee and lard
- cream
- hard cheeses
- cakes and biscuits
- foods containing coconut or palm oil

Eating foods that contain unsaturated fat instead of saturated fat can actually help reduce cholesterol levels.

Try to replace foods containing saturated fats with small amounts of foods high in unsaturated fats, such as:

- oily fish – such as mackerel and salmon
- nuts – such as almonds and cashews
- seeds – such as sunflower and pumpkin seeds
- avocados
- vegetable oils and spreads – such as rapeseed or vegetable oil, sunflower, olive, corn and walnut oils

## Trans fats

Trans fats can also raise cholesterol levels. Trans fats can be found naturally in small amounts in some foods, such as animal products, including meat, milk and dairy foods.

Artificial trans fats can be found in hydrogenated fat, so some processed foods, such as biscuits and cakes, can contain trans fats.

In the UK, manufacturers and most of the supermarkets have reduced the amount of trans fats in their products.

Most people in the UK do not eat a lot of trans fats, but you should keep checking food labels for hydrogenated fats or oils.

## Reducing total fat

Reducing the total amount of fat in your diet can also help reduce your risk of heart disease.

Instead of roasting or frying, consider:

- grilling
- steaming
- poaching
- boiling
- microwaving

Choose lean cuts of meat and go for lower-fat varieties of dairy products and spreads, or eat a smaller amount of full-fat varieties.

## Fibre and cholesterol

Eating plenty of [fibre](#) helps lower your risk of heart disease, and some high-fibre foods can help lower your cholesterol.

Adults should aim for at least 30g of fibre a day.

Your diet should include a mix of sources of fibre, which include:

- wholemeal bread, bran and wholegrain cereals
- fruit and vegetables
- potatoes with their skins on
- oats and barley
- pulses, such as beans, peas and lentils
- nuts and seeds

## Foods containing cholesterol

Some foods naturally contain cholesterol, called dietary cholesterol. Foods such as kidneys, eggs and prawns are higher in dietary cholesterol than other foods.

Dietary cholesterol has much less of an effect on the level of cholesterol in your blood than the amount of saturated fat you eat does.

If your GP has advised you to change your diet to reduce your blood cholesterol, the most important thing to do is to cut down on saturated fat.

It's also a good idea to increase your intake of fruit, vegetables and fibre.

## Get active

An active lifestyle can also help lower your cholesterol level. Activities can range from walking and cycling to more vigorous exercise, such as running and energetic dancing.

Doing 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity every week can improve your cholesterol levels.

[Moderate aerobic activity](#) means you're working hard enough to raise your heart rate and break a sweat.

One way to tell whether you're exercising at a moderate intensity is if you can still talk but cannot sing the words to a song.

Read more about [getting more active](#) and achieving your [recommended activity levels](#).

## Cholesterol-lowering products

If your doctor has told you that you have high cholesterol and you can lower it by changing your diet, there's no need to buy special products to lower your cholesterol.

These products are not recommended by doctors and are no substitute for a healthy, balanced diet.

There are foods specially designed to lower your cholesterol, such as certain dairy spreads and yoghurts containing added ingredients called plant sterols and stanols.

There's some evidence these ingredients may help reduce the cholesterol in your blood, but there's no evidence they also reduce your risk of a heart attack or stroke.

These products are designed for people who already have high cholesterol, but it's not essential to eat plant sterols or stanols to help manage your cholesterol.

There may be other, simpler and less expensive changes you can make, such as eating a healthy, balanced diet and being more physically active.

There are some groups of people these products are not suitable for, including children and pregnant or breastfeeding women.

If you do eat foods designed to lower your cholesterol, read the label carefully. These foods need to be eaten every day and in the right amount, as having too much could be harmful.