



High cholesterol

Overview

By Mayo Clinic Staff

Cholesterol is a waxy substance that's found in the fats (lipids) in your blood. While your body needs cholesterol to continue building healthy cells, having high cholesterol can increase your risk of heart disease.

When you have high cholesterol, you may develop fatty deposits in your blood vessels. Eventually, these deposits make it difficult for enough blood to flow through your arteries. Your heart may not get as much oxygen-rich blood as it needs, which increases the risk of a heart attack. Decreased blood flow to your brain can cause a stroke.

High cholesterol can be inherited, but it's often the result of unhealthy lifestyle choices, and thus preventable and treatable. A healthy diet, regular exercise and sometimes medication can go a long way toward reducing high cholesterol.

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