

Cholesterol Myths Fiction and Fact

There are lots of myths about cholesterol. Maybe you've heard some of them—maybe you even believe some of them.

See which of the common cholesterol “fictions” you thought were true—and read the facts behind them.

As you probably know—“knowledge is power.” But so much information on the Internet and in the library can be confusing. You will need to be careful when researching the facts about your condition and then separate fact from the “fictions” that exist.



Fiction

All your cholesterol comes from food.

Fact Most of the cholesterol inside you doesn't come from the food you eat, but from your body's natural processes.

Fiction

To control your cholesterol, just eat more oat-based hot and cold cereals.

Fact A healthy diet is important for lowering your "bad" low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, but diet alone may not be enough. Some people inherit high cholesterol just the way they inherit eye color. So, many people can have healthy eating habits and still have high cholesterol.

Fiction

It's okay to stop taking your cholesterol medication once you get your numbers down.

Fact If you stop taking your cholesterol medication, your bad LDL cholesterol might bounce back to where it was when you started. When your cholesterol goes back up, so does your risk of heart attack and stroke. While there's no "cure" for high cholesterol, it can be managed successfully. Managing cholesterol successfully takes a *lifelong* commitment to your health—including taking your medication *every* day.

Fiction

High cholesterol isn't a problem for thin people.

Fact Thin, overweight, or in-between, everyone should have their cholesterol checked regularly. While overweight people tend to have high cholesterol from eating too much fatty food, those who don't gain weight easily need to be aware of how much saturated fat they eat.

Fiction

There's no need to have your cholesterol checked until you're middle-aged.

Fact Even children—especially those with a family history of heart disease—can have high cholesterol levels. Getting cholesterol levels checked at an early age is a good idea.

Fiction

I take cholesterol-lowering medication, so I can eat anything I want.

Fact A healthy lifestyle—along with medication if necessary—is the best way to help prevent heart disease. Taking medication doesn't eliminate the need to reduce the amount of saturated fat and cholesterol in your diet and to enjoy regular physical activity.

Fiction

Women don't need to worry about high cholesterol.

Fact It's true that before menopause, women's hormone levels usually give some protection from having high levels of bad LDL cholesterol. But after menopause, even women who follow a heart-healthy diet and get regular exercise may find their cholesterol levels going up.

Fiction

Switching from butter to margarine will help lower my cholesterol.

Fact Margarine, like butter, is high in fat—and all fatty foods should be eaten in moderation if you have high cholesterol. Most margarine contains saturated fat, a major food factor in high cholesterol. The recommended choice is a liquid vegetable oil or soft margarine that doesn't contain any trans fat (hydrogenated vegetable oil).

Remember

When you are unable to separate the facts from fiction where your health is concerned, there's no harm in writing down your questions and taking them with you when you visit your doctor. This is just one of the ways that you can “partner” with your doctor to make sure you are on the right track with the right information.