

The aim of the Poplar Grove Practice is to provide a high standard of holistic primary care to our entitled patients by working together as a cohesive multi-disciplinary team.

Our commitment to you, our patients, is to provide you with the highest possible standard of medical care with an efficiently run and friendly service. You will be treated as an individual with dignity, courtesy and respect at all times, irrespective of your ethnic origin, religious belief, sex or sexuality, personal attributes or the nature of your health problems. We expect to be treated in the same way.



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Lines open daily between:

0800 - 1230 and 1400 - 1830



Patient Information Leaflet

Cholesterol

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What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a fat chemical (lipid) that is made in the cells in your body. Many different cells make cholesterol but cells in the liver make about a quarter of the total. You need some cholesterol to keep healthy.

Although many foods contain cholesterol, it is poorly absorbed by the gut into the body. Therefore, cholesterol that you eat in food has little effect on your body and blood cholesterol level.

A certain amount of cholesterol is present in the bloodstream. Cholesterol is carried in the blood as part of particles called lipoproteins. There are different types of lipoproteins but the most relevant to cholesterol are:

- Low-density lipoproteins carrying cholesterol (LDL cholesterol). This is often referred to as 'bad' cholesterol. This is the one mainly involved in forming blockages in the arteries (atheroma). Atheroma is the main underlying cause of various cardiovascular diseases (see below). The majority of cholesterol in the blood is LDL cholesterol but how much varies from person to person.
- High-density lipoproteins carrying cholesterol (HDL cholesterol). This is often referred to as 'good' cholesterol. This may prevent atheroma forming.

What factors affect the blood level of cholesterol?

To an extent your blood cholesterol level can vary depending on your diet. However, different people who eat the same diet can have different blood cholesterol levels. In general, however, if you eat less fatty food in your diet your cholesterol level is likely to go down.

In some people a high cholesterol level is due to another condition. For example, an

underactive thyroid gland, obesity, drinking a lot of alcohol and some rare kidney and liver disorders can raise the cholesterol level.

In some people a very high level of cholesterol runs in the family, due to a genetic problem with the way cholesterol is made by the cells in your body. One example is called familial hypercholesterolaemia.

Risk factors

Everybody has some risk of developing small fatty lumps (atheroma) within the inside lining of blood vessels, which then may cause one or more cardiovascular diseases. However, some situations increase the risk. These include:

Lifestyle risk factors that can be prevented or changed:

- Smoking.
- Lack of physical activity (a sedentary lifestyle).
- Obesity.
- An unhealthy diet - including eating too much salt.
- Excess alcohol.

Treatable or partly treatable risk factors:

- High blood pressure (hypertension).
- High cholesterol blood level. However, only LDL cholesterol is a risk factor. HDL cholesterol is healthy for your body.
- High triglyceride (another type of fat) blood level.
- Diabetes.
- Kidney diseases that affect kidney function.

Fixed risk factors - ones that you cannot alter:

- A strong family history. This means if you have a father or brother who developed heart disease or a stroke before they were 55, or in a mother or sister before they were 65.

- Being male.
- An early menopause in women.
- Age. You are more likely to develop atheroma as you get older.
- Ethnic group. For example, people who live in the UK whose family came from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka have an increased risk.

However, if you have a fixed risk factor, you may want to make extra effort to tackle any lifestyle risk factors that can be changed.

Cholesterol blood levels

Cholesterol blood levels are very important but must be considered in an overall assessment of your risk of cardiovascular disease (see below). The following blood cholesterol levels are generally regarded as desirable:

- Total cholesterol (TChol) - 5.0 mmol/L or less. However, about 2 in 3 adults in the UK have a TChol level of 5.0 mmol/L or above.
- LDL cholesterol after an overnight fast: 3.0 mmol/L or less.
- HDL cholesterol: 1.2 mmol/L or more.
- TChol/HDL ratio: 4.5 or less. That is, your TChol divided by your HDL cholesterol. This reflects the fact that for any given TChol level, the more HDL, the better.

As a rule, the higher the LDL cholesterol level, the greater the risk to health. A blood test only measuring total cholesterol may be misleading. A high total cholesterol may be caused by a high HDL cholesterol level and is therefore healthy. It is very important to know the separate LDL cholesterol and HDL cholesterol levels.