

What is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a naturally occurring fat, or lipid, that is important to the cell structure and is used to make some classes of hormones. Cholesterol is both made by our body and derived from the food we eat. All animal products, whether steak, butter or fish, contain some level of Cholesterol.

Like all fats, cholesterol is insoluble in water. In order to transport cholesterol throughout the body it is packaged in complexes with proteins called lipoproteins. Most cholesterol is carried in what are called low-density lipoproteins or LDL. In-general, when you have a high level of cholesterol in the blood you have a high level of LDL. LDL can deposit cholesterol in blood vessels where it can accumulate and decrease the flow of blood.

Another carrier of cholesterol is high-density lipoprotein or HDL. HDL is sometimes called "good" cholesterol because this type of lipoprotein can pick up cholesterol and carry it back to the liver where it can be degraded and excreted from the body.

Experts agree that a total cholesterol level under 200mg/dl is considered desirable. Experts also agree that a low total cholesterol level does not necessarily mean low risk and that low levels of HDL cholesterol actually increase your risk of coronary heart disease.