

What Is HDL in Blood?

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It may surprise you, but not all cholesterol in the blood is considered bad. When your doctor performs your annual physical examination, chances are one of the things that he will order is a complete "lipid profile." A lipid profile looks at the amount of LDL or "bad" type of cholesterol, as well as the HDL or "good" type of cholesterol.

Many heart disease experts find that, more important than just one particular number, the [relationship](#) between your LDL and HDL is the best indicator of your risk for heart disease.

Not All Cholesterol Is Alike

When your doctor evaluates the results of your blood tests, some of the things that he is looking for are the levels of your "total cholesterol," "LDL cholesterol," and "HDL Cholesterol." Individually, they each say something about your diet and how well your body manufactures the building blocks of hormones.

Together, they can give you some sense of your relative risk for heart disease.

The Bad Type of Cholesterol

One of the most important indicators for your relative risk for heart disease is your "low density lipoprotein" or "LDL." LDL cholesterol is a natural building block for cell walls and contributes to the production of hormones. Without cholesterol, life would cease to exist.

On the other hand, high levels of LDL can contribute to the accumulation of plaque on the inside of arteries. When enough plaque accumulates, it can significantly restrict the blood flow to major organs, including the heart and brain. When this happens, you may experience a heart attack or stroke.

The Good Type of Cholesterol

High Density Lipoproteins or "HDL" are thought to offer a form of protection against heart disease by acting as "scavengers," carrying away the bad type of cholesterol and transporting it to the liver where it is degraded and eliminated from the body. For this reason, the more HDL cholesterol you have, the better and the lower your risk for heart disease.

The LDL to HDL Ratio

Many [health](#) care professionals find that the ratio between the LDL or "bad" cholesterol and the HDL or "good" type of cholesterol is more important than either number on their own. Some people, due to [family](#) history, naturally have higher levels of LDL than others of their same sex, age and activity level. Still, others maintain much lower HDL levels that by themselves would suggest a higher risk for heart disease. But, by making attempts to lower their LDL and increase their HDL, two different people with completely different health histories may end up with the same relative risk for heart disease.

How to Improve Your Numbers

Regardless of what your lipid profile level suggests, there is plenty you can do to help improve your numbers. If your lipid profiles typically indicates high LDL levels, then your first approach should be working with your health care professional and a registered dietitian to make healthy adjustments to your

diet. If your HDL levels are typically low, you may want to enlist the help of an exercise specialist who can set up a quality exercise program that emphasizes aerobic exercise. Twenty minutes or more of daily aerobic exercise has been shown to increase HDL levels.

If all of these approaches fail, you may want to work with your physician to prescribe lipid lowering medications. There are many on the market and should only be considered as a last ditch effort for improving your lipid profile numbers.