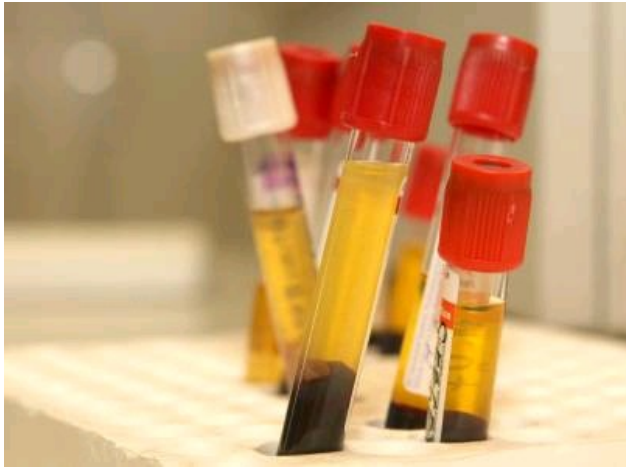


# What Is a Good HDL Level?

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Anyone who is concerned with the [health](#) of their heart undoubtedly knows that there are a number of risk factors that can affect the chances of developing coronary artery disease. Some of these, such as cigarette smoking, obesity and your diet, are relatively easy to manage. Others, like your [family](#) history and the specific makeup of your blood cholesterol, are more difficult.

## The Importance of Cholesterol

When people think about cholesterol, they often first think about all of the delicious snacks that they're not supposed to eat---foods that are loaded with the "bad" type of cholesterol. The fact is, the body needs cholesterol to survive and having enough of it around is just as important as not having too much. Cholesterol is a soft, waxy-like substance that is produced by the liver and is responsible for not only providing the cells of the body with their shape, but also their permeability---how well fluids pass in and out of cells. Cholesterol is also important for nerve conduction and is the main source of "bile" that is important in the digestion of food. Cholesterol also produces many "hormones" that regulate the proper maintenance of the body---in particular, sex hormones. Cholesterol circulates through the body as a "lipid" or fat. Because of this, it needs to wrap itself inside of "proteins" in order to mix with water-soluble blood and other solutions. While the body is capable of manufacturing enough cholesterol to maintain good health, it is also easy to take in too much "bad" cholesterol that can lead to heart disease.

## Low Density Lipoprotein

Low density lipoproteins, or LDL, are considered "bad" cholesterol because it contributes to the build-up of plaque, causing "atherosclerosis" and heart disease. When plaque begins to occlude the internal lining of the arteries that supply blood to the heart and brain, a heart attack or stroke can occur.

## High Density Lipoprotein

High density lipoproteins, or HDL, are considered the "good" type of cholesterol because they offer some protection against the threat of heart disease. While LDL cholesterol contributes to the advancement of heart disease, HDL can actually prevent it. There are a number of theories about exactly how this happens. The most widely accepted opinion is that HDL carries LDL away from the internal lining of the arteries that supply blood to the heart, back to the liver where it is eventually excreted from the body. Others theorize that HDL cholesterol works "pro-actively" to prevent LDL cholesterol from depositing inside the arteries.

## Typical LDL and HDL Levels

According to the American Heart Association, adults should maintain LDL levels lower than 100 mg/dl to maintain an optimal risk for heart disease. Near optimal levels are 100 to 120 mg/dl. Borderline high levels are between 130 to 159 mg/dl. High risk levels are from 160 to 189 mg/dl and very high risks are 190 mg/dl and above.

Contrary to LDL levels, you should strive to maintain high levels of HDL. A desirable level for HDL is 60 mg/dl or above. A moderate risk is 40 to 50 mg/dl and a high risk for heart disease is less than 40 mg/dl.

# How You Can Raise HDL Cholesterol

There are a number of ways you can increase your HDL levels, some unintentionally and some by choice. First, inheriting good genes from your parents who have no history of heart disease is one of the best ways to insure that you'll remain at low risk as well.

More controllable ways to increase your HDL is to abstain from cigarette smoking, get regular aerobic [exercise](#) (for at least 20 minutes a day) and eat certain types of foods that contain omega-3 fish oils.

More important than any one number is the relationship between all of them: the goal is to keep your total cholesterol down, by lowering your LDL cholesterol and raising your HDL cholesterol.