

SEPTEMBER

CHOLESTEROL EDUCATION MONTH

September is National Cholesterol Education Month, which is a perfect time to learn about cholesterol, its impact on your health, and how to manage it effectively. High cholesterol often has no symptoms, but understanding its risks and taking proactive steps can help protect your heart and overall health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), from 2017–2020, 86.4 million U.S. adults aged 20+ had high, or borderline high, cholesterol.

What is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that occurs naturally in the body. It plays essential roles, such as:

- Building cell walls
- Producing vitamin D and hormones
- Protecting nerve fibers with myelin
- Aiding digestion by making bile

While your body needs cholesterol for these functions, too much cholesterol can lead to plaque buildup in arteries, which may increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.

There are 2 types of cholesterol:

- **LDL ("Bad" Cholesterol):** High levels can cause plaque buildup in arteries
- **HDL ("Good" Cholesterol):** Helps remove excess cholesterol from the bloodstream

Preventing and Managing High Cholesterol

1. **Diet:** Focus on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, lentils, and healthy fats (olive oil and avocados), while limiting saturated fats found in fatty meats, high-fat dairy products, and desserts
2. **Exercise:** Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity most days
3. **Avoid Smoking:** Smoking lowers HDL and increases LDL
4. **Medication:** Follow your doctor's advice if lifestyle changes aren't enough
5. **Other Tips:** Manage stress, get quality sleep, limit alcohol, and maintain a healthy weight

Get Tested

High cholesterol often has no symptoms, so regular testing is crucial. A simple blood test, called a "lipid profile," can measure your cholesterol levels. Please consult your doctor to determine if this test is appropriate for you.

Who Should Be Tested?

- **Healthy Adults:** Every 4–6 years
- **Children & Adolescents:** At least once between ages 9–11 and again between ages 17–21
- **Higher Risk Groups:** People with heart disease, diabetes, obesity, or a family history of high cholesterol may need more frequent testing

If you are enrolled in Air Group's medical and prescription drug plan, annual cholesterol screenings are covered 100% when you use an in-network provider!

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/cholesterol/testing.

Take charge of your heart health today by getting your cholesterol checked and making heart-healthy choices!

Sources:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/cholesterol/testing/index.html>
- <https://healthylearn.com/connerstrong/hc/cholesterol-health.html>
- <https://healthylearn.com/connerstrong/lh/what-is-cholesterol.html>

