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## Cholesterol and Children

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. Recent research has shown that heart disease starts in childhood and that if lifestyle changes are made in childhood the benefits can carry over into adulthood. Because of this, it is recommended that **all** children be screened and treated for elevated blood cholesterol levels.

### WHAT IS CHOLESTEROL?

Cholesterol is a type of fat found in the body's blood. It is needed for certain body functions but too much of it over years can build up in the blood vessels and lead to a blockage (or "heart attack" or "stroke").

Cholesterol comes from the food that we eat and is also made in the liver. Dietary cholesterol comes from animal products (i.e. meat, eggs, dairy products).

### WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF CHOLESTEROL?

There are two main "types" of cholesterol: LDL ("bad") and HDL ("good"). LDL cholesterol is the type of cholesterol that can build up in the blood and lead to blockage of blood vessels. HDL cholesterol is the "good" cholesterol because it brings the cholesterol to the liver to be processed and in doing so decreases the build up in the blood stream and protects the body from blood vessel blockage. Because of this **high levels of LDL** and/or **low levels of HDL increase** a person's risk of heart disease and stroke.

### WHAT ARE NORMAL LEVELS OF CHOLESTEROL?

CATEGORY	Acceptable (mg/dL)	Borderline (mg/dL)	High (mg/dL)	Low (mg/dL)
Total Cholesterol	Less than 170	170-199	200 or greater	
LDL Cholesterol	Less than 110	110-129	130 or greater	
HDL Cholesterol	Greater than 45	40-45		Less than 40

### WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE CHOLESTEROL LEVELS?

- **DIET** Eating a low fat, low cholesterol diet can help lower cholesterol levels. No more than 30% of total calories should come from fat, with less than 1/3 of that from saturated fat. Total intake of cholesterol per day should be less than 300 milligrams.
- **EXERCISE** Doing vigorous aerobic exercise for at least 30 minutes daily is the best way to increase HDL levels.
- **IDEAL BODY WEIGHT** People who are overweight tend to have higher levels of LDL and lower levels of HDL.
- **AVOID SMOKING** Smoking increases a person's risk of heart disease.
- **MEDICATIONS** If lifestyle change do not improve cholesterol levels it may be recommended that a medication be started to help attain healthy cholesterol levels.