

UNDERSTANDING HIGH CHOLESTEROL IN CHILDREN



AND HOW TO MANAGE TIPS FOR PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

High cholesterol is not just an adult problem. Children and teenagers can also develop abnormal cholesterol levels, which may increase the risk of future heart disease if left untreated. Early recognition and healthy lifestyle changes can make a major difference.



WHAT IS CHOLESTEROL?

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance found in the blood. The body needs some cholesterol to build cells and hormones, but too much can lead to plaque buildup inside blood vessels.

LDL ("Bad" Cholesterol):
High levels can clog arteries.

HDL ("Good" Cholesterol):
Helps remove excess cholesterol from the bloodstream.

Triglycerides:
Another type of fat in the blood that can rise with unhealthy diet and obesity.

CAUSES OF HIGH CHOLESTEROL IN CHILDREN

1 Unhealthy Lifestyle

- Diet high in fast food, fried food, chips, sweets, and sugary drinks
- Lack of physical activity
- Excess screen time
- Obesity

2 Family History (Genetic Causes)

Some children inherit high cholesterol from their parents, known as: **Familial Hypercholesterolemia (FH)**
A genetic condition causing very high LDL levels from a young age.

3 Medical Conditions

- Diabetes
- Hypothyroidism
- Kidney disease
- Liver disease

WARNING SIGNS

Most children with high cholesterol have no symptoms.

Sometimes severe inherited cholesterol disorders may cause:

Yellow fatty deposits around eyes or joints

Strong family history of early heart disease

Heart attacks or strokes in relatives at young ages

WHO SHOULD BE TESTED?

Children may need cholesterol screening if they:

- ✓ Have obesity or overweight
- ✓ Have diabetes or high blood pressure
- ✓ Have a family history of high cholesterol
- ✓ Have relatives with early heart disease
- ✓ Eat unhealthy diets or have sedentary lifestyles

Many experts recommend:
Routine cholesterol screening between ages 9–11
Repeat screening during adolescence

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CHANGES CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE!

HEART-HEALTHY DIET

Encourage:

- Fruits and vegetables
- Whole grains
- Beans and legumes
- Fish
- Lean meats
- Low-fat dairy
- Nuts (if age appropriate)

Limit:

- Fried foods
- Processed meats
- Fast food
- Sugary drinks
- Excess sweets
- Foods high in saturated and trans fats



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Children should aim for:
At least **60 minutes** of physical activity daily



Limit screen time when possible.



HEALTHY WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

Maintaining a healthy weight can:

- ✓ Lower LDL cholesterol
- ✓ Improve HDL cholesterol
- ✓ Reduce triglycerides
- ✓ Improve overall heart health



WHEN ARE MEDICATIONS NEEDED?

Some children—especially those with familial hypercholesterolemia or very high LDL levels—may need medication such as statins.

Medication decisions depend on:

- LDL level
- Family history
- Presence of other risk factors
- Response to lifestyle changes

Treatment should always be guided by a pediatrician or pediatric cardiologist.



TIPS FOR FAMILIES

Make healthy eating a family habit. Children succeed best when the whole family participates.

Read nutrition labels. Look for lower saturated fat, lower sugar, and higher fiber.

Encourage active fun. Choose enjoyable activities instead of focusing only on "exercise."

Avoid smoking exposure. Secondhand smoke increases cardiovascular risk.

Keep follow-up appointments. Regular monitoring helps track progress and guide treatment.

WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL ADVICE

Contact your healthcare provider if your child:

- ⚠ Has a strong family history of early heart disease
- ⚠ Has obesity or diabetes
- ⚠ Has abnormal cholesterol tests
- ⚠ Develops chest pain, shortness of breath, or exercise intolerance

KEY MESSAGE

High cholesterol in children is often preventable and treatable. Healthy eating, regular exercise, maintaining a healthy weight, and early screening can protect long-term heart health and reduce future cardiovascular disease risk.



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CARDIAC DIET

Eat for a Healthy Heart, Live for a Better Life

A heart-healthy eating plan can help lower blood pressure, reduce cholesterol, and support a strong, healthy heart.



✓ FOCUS ON



1 FRUITS & VEGETABLES

- Rich in vitamins, minerals, fiber and antioxidants
- Aim for a variety of colors every day



2 WHOLE GRAINS

- Choose whole grains like oats, brown rice, quinoa, and whole-wheat bread
- Help lower cholesterol and keep blood sugar stable



3 LEAN PROTEINS

- Choose fish (especially fatty fish like salmon), skinless poultry, beans, lentils, and tofu
- Build and repair tissues while supporting heart health



4 HEALTHY FATS

- Choose olive oil, nuts, seeds, and avocado
- These healthy fats support heart function
- Use in moderation



✗ LIMIT OR AVOID



HIGH-SODIUM FOODS

- Processed foods
- Canned soups
- Fast food

Too much sodium can raise blood pressure and strain your heart.



SUGARY FOODS & DRINKS

- Soda
- Candy & desserts
- Sweetened beverages

These add empty calories and increase the risk of obesity and heart disease.



SATURATED & TRANS FATS

- Fried foods
- Fatty red meat
- Butter, margarine, shortening

These can raise LDL (bad) cholesterol and increase heart disease risk.

KEY PRINCIPLES



EAT MORE FIBER

To help lower cholesterol



REDUCE SALT (SODIUM)

Helps control blood pressure



CHOOSE HEALTHY FATS

For a stronger heart



CONTROL PORTION SIZES

To maintain a healthy weight



STAY HYDRATED

Drink plenty of water daily



STAY ACTIVE

Pair healthy eating with regular activity

SAMPLE DAY (SIMPLE)



BREAKFAST

Oatmeal with berries and a sprinkle of nuts



LUNCH

Grilled chicken salad with olive oil dressing



DINNER

Baked salmon, brown rice, steamed vegetables



SNACK

A piece of fruit or a handful of nuts



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