Cholesterol

The facts!

Cholesterol is a type of fat found in the bloodstream. Your body needs some cholesterol to work effectively.

Cholesterol has many good uses, but is a problem when there is too much of it in the blood.

High cholesterol can clog the blood vessels that supply the heart and other parts of the body. This can reduce the flow of blood to the heart and lead to a heart attack.

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a white, waxy, fatty substance. It is made in the liver and released into the bloodstream. You can also get cholesterol from the food you eat. It is important to get your cholesterol checked and learn how to manage your cholesterol.

The different types of cholesterol

HDL

High-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol is sometimes called good cholesterol.

HDL protects you against heart disease by carrying the extra cholesterol out of your arteries, which lowers your chance of having a heart attack or stroke. The more HDL you have, the better. Exercise can also increase your good cholesterol.

LDL

Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol is sometimes called bad cholesterol.

LDL leads to a build-up of bad fat in the artery walls, which can lead to chest pain, heart disease, heart attack, stroke, and kidney and circulation problems.

Triglycerides

Triglycerides are often present in people who have diabetes or alcoholism. They increase the risk of heart disease.

What causes high cholesterol?

Foods high in saturated and trans fat increase cholesterol levels.

Saturated and trans fats are found mainly in:

• fatty meats

• full cream dairy products (e.g. milk, cream, cheese and butter)

• deep-fried take-away foods

• baked products (e.g. biscuits and pastries).

You should limit the amount of foods you eat that contain saturated and trans fats.

Tips to improve your cholesterol

• Stop smoking

• Limit animal fats (e.g. butter, cream, cheese, fried foods)

• Eat more fibre (e.g. fruit, vegetables, cereals, baked beans)

• Eat more fish

• Drink less alcohol (grog)

• Maintain a healthy weight

• Increase physical activity – aim for 30 minutes or more of moderate intensity physical activity every day of the week

• Take your medicine every day as directed by your doctor – medication can help reduce your cholesterol if it's too high