



British Heart
Foundation

10 MINUTES TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE Lowering cholesterol



**FIGHT
FOR EVERY
HEARTBEAT**

bhf.org.uk

High cholesterol isn't something you can feel or notice, but if you have it you're more likely to have a heart attack or stroke.

The good news is there are lots of things you can do to help lower your cholesterol so your risk is lower.

You're in control. By taking ten minutes every day to make small changes to your lifestyle, you could lower your cholesterol – and change your life.

ABOUT HIGH CHOLESTEROL

What is cholesterol?

Your blood carries **oxygen** and **nutrients** (from your food) around your body so that your **organs**, (like your heart, lungs and brain) can work properly.

Cholesterol is a fatty substance in your blood. There are two different types of cholesterol – **HDL cholesterol** and **LDL cholesterol**. HDL is sometimes called 'good' cholesterol and LDL is called 'bad' cholesterol.

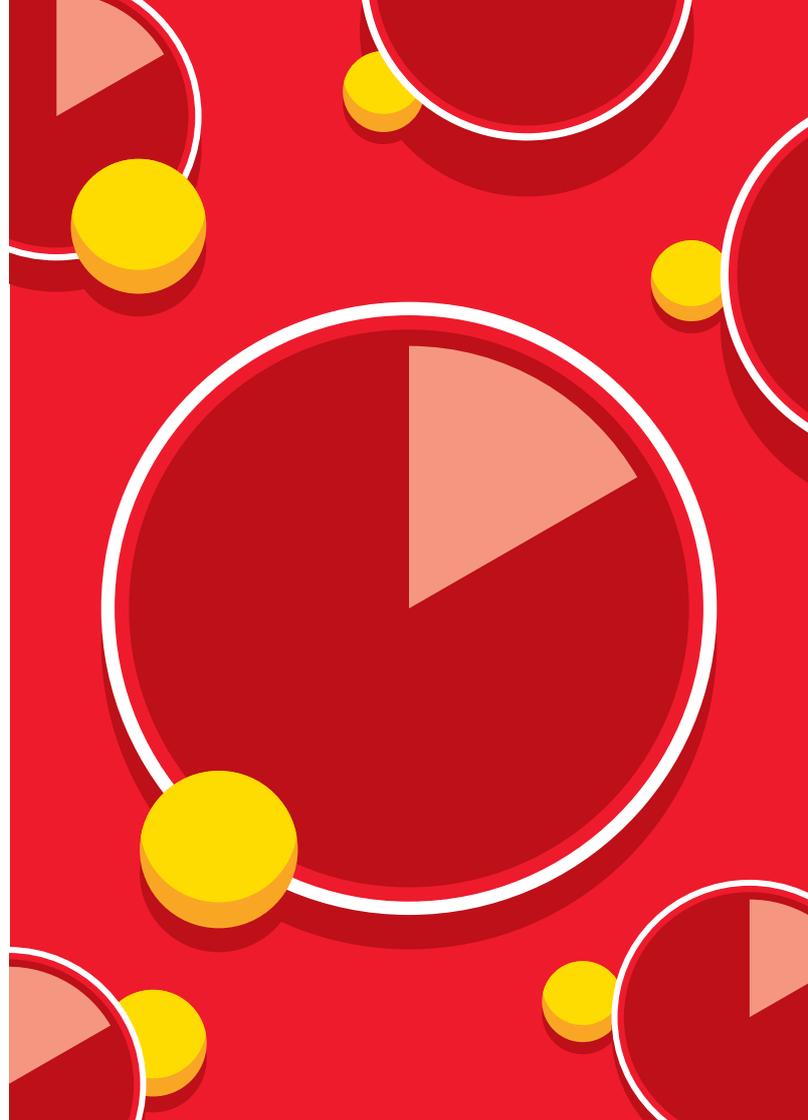
Everyone has some cholesterol in their blood. But if you have too much bad LDL cholesterol in your blood, you are more likely to have a **heart attack** or a **stroke**.

Why does having high cholesterol put me at risk?

Your heart and brain need **oxygen** from your blood to work properly. If the tubes that supply your heart muscle or brain with blood (your **arteries**) get clogged up or blocked with fatty material, less oxygen can get to them.

If this happens to your heart muscle, you'll have a **heart attack**. If this happens to your brain, you'll have a **stroke**.

Having too much bad **LDL cholesterol** in your blood can make fatty material clog up your arteries. So having high cholesterol means you're much more likely to have a heart attack or stroke.



Confused by cholesterol?

When people talk about keeping their **cholesterol** down, they usually mean their **total** cholesterol level. Your total cholesterol level is worked out using your good **HDL cholesterol** level and your bad **LDL cholesterol** level. It also includes **triglycerides** – another type of fatty substance in your blood.

Having a high total cholesterol level can mean that you have a lot of bad LDL cholesterol in your blood, which means you're more likely to have a **heart attack** or a **stroke**.

But having good HDL cholesterol in your blood can help keep your bad LDL cholesterol in check. To help you stay healthy, you want your bad LDL level to be **low**, but your good HDL level to be **high**.

What does my cholesterol reading mean?

If you've had a blood test to find out your **blood cholesterol level**, you might see your total cholesterol level written as something like 4.2 **mmol/l** or hear it said as "Four point two **millimoles** per litre".

Or you might be given three numbers for your cholesterol reading – a total cholesterol level, then one for good **HDL cholesterol**, and one for bad **LDL cholesterol**.

For example, you might have a total blood cholesterol level of 6 mmol/l with an HDL of 2 mmol/l and an LDL of 4 mmol/l.

What should my cholesterol reading be?

Unless your doctor tells you something different:

- your total cholesterol level should be below 4 mmol/l
- your bad LDL cholesterol level should be below 2 mmol/l
- your good HDL cholesterol level should be above 1 mmol/l.

If your total cholesterol level is over 4 and your LDL is over 2, this shows that you might be at higher risk of a heart attack or stroke.

Fill in your cholesterol here

Total cholesterol:

Bad LDL cholesterol:

Good HDL cholesterol:

Still in the dark? Chat with your doctor or nurse who will be able to explain to you what your cholesterol reading means.

Why do I have high cholesterol?

It may be hard to tell what has caused your high cholesterol, but we know you're more likely to get it if:

- you eat a lot of saturated fat
- you smoke
- you don't do enough physical activity
- you drink too much alcohol too often
- you have other health problems like thyroid, kidney or liver disease.

In rare cases a condition passed down through your family called **familial hypercholesterolaemia (FH)** can make you have very high cholesterol.

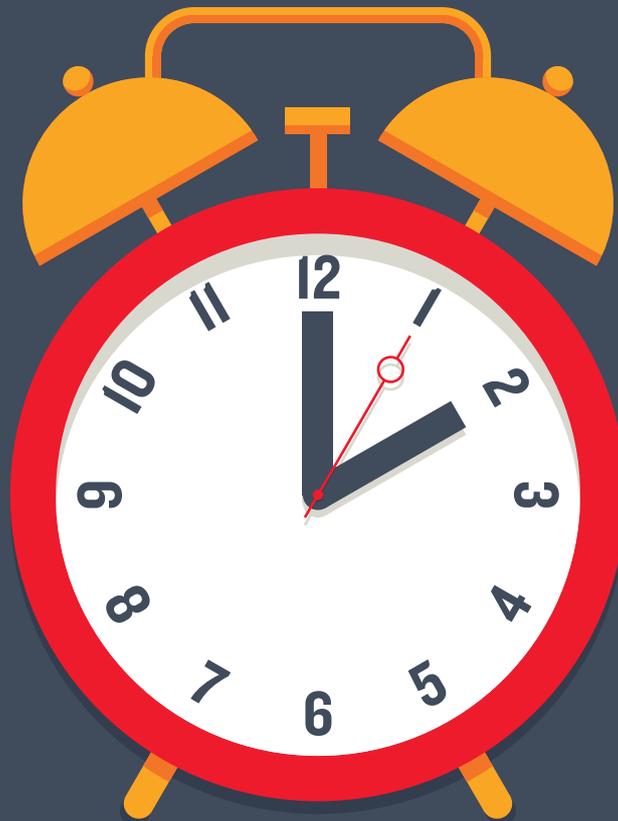
TACKLING HIGH CHOLESTEROL

Time for a change?

There are some simple things you can do to help lower your cholesterol.

- Eat a diet full of fruit and veg and low in saturated fat.
- Be active for at least 150 minutes a week.
- Drink less alcohol and quit smoking.

Take a look at the back page for your 10 minute cholesterol challenge



Time to eat well

Eating **saturated fat** can increase the bad LDL cholesterol in your blood, so eating less of it can help keep your cholesterol levels down.

High fibre foods can also help lower your cholesterol.

What can I do?

- Avoid foods that are high in saturated fat - foods like butter and lard, fatty meat, sausages, cheese, pies and cakes.
- Check the labels on your food and choose foods that don't contain much saturated fat. Most food labels use colour coding to show you whether a food has a high (red), medium (amber), or low (green) amount of fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt.
- Choose foods that contain **monounsaturated** or **polyunsaturated** fats instead of saturated fats.
- Fruit and veg are full of fibre – so make sure you get at least 5 portions a day.
- Eat plenty of other high fibre foods like oats, beans and lentils, and choose wholegrain foods when you can.



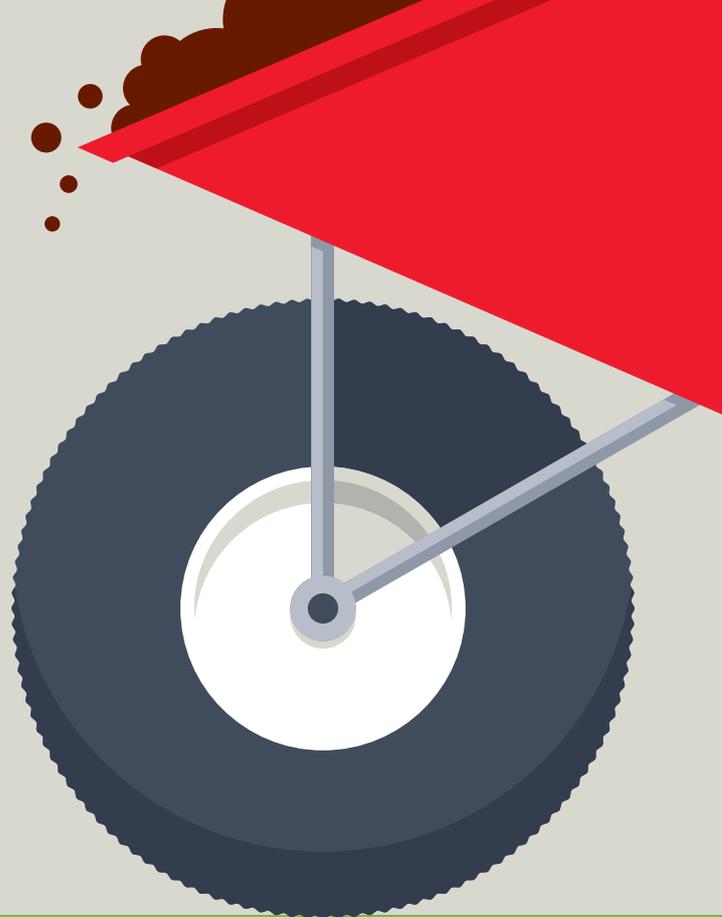
Time to get moving

Being active helps raise your good HDL cholesterol and keep your bad LDL cholesterol in check.

What can I do?

- Be active every day. This doesn't always have to mean jogging or aerobics – gentle, everyday activities like walking, gardening and climbing stairs are great ways to get started.
- The type of activity that helps your heart most will make you feel warmer, breathe harder and make your heart beat faster than usual. Aim to work up to at least 150 minutes of this type of activity a week. You can spread this out over the week however you like.

Remember – every ten minutes counts.



Time to cut down

A chemical found in cigarettes called **acrolein** stops good HDL cholesterol from working properly. This means if you smoke you're more likely to have high cholesterol.

Regularly drinking too much alcohol can also raise your cholesterol.

What can I do?

- Drink less alcohol and quit smoking to help lower your cholesterol and keep your heart healthy.

Talk to your doctor or go to [bhf.org.uk/ten](https://www.bhf.org.uk/ten) for more information



Cholesterol medication

Making changes to your lifestyle may lower your cholesterol enough. But if your cholesterol is very high or if lifestyle changes are not enough, your doctor might suggest that you take **medication** to control it and lower your risk of having a **heart attack** or **stroke**.

You don't normally feel or notice high cholesterol so it can be easy to forget to take your medication. But it's very important to take it in the way your doctor tells you because it will help cut your risk.

If you're already taking medication for high cholesterol, you should still eat well, be active and quit smoking to keep your risk of a heart attack or stroke as low as it can be.



Haider's success story

"In my 30s I started having chest pains.

I had tests and they said there was a big problem. I had a heart bypass at the age of 32. It just seemed so unbelievable.

I never smoked, I wasn't overweight. But I did have high cholesterol.

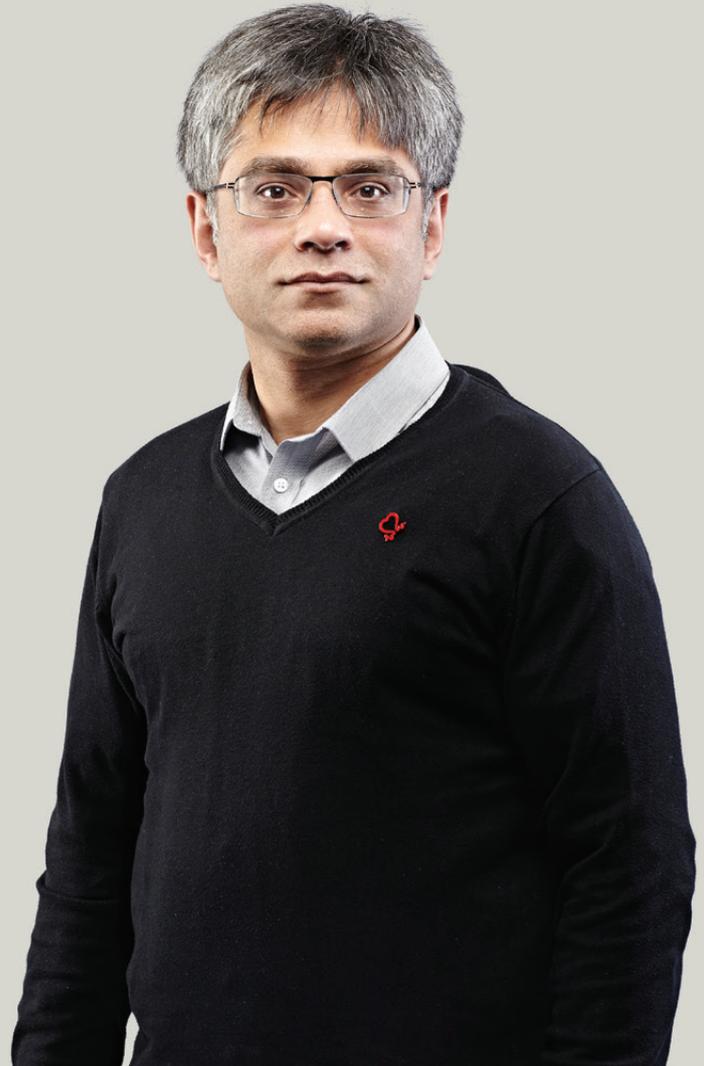
Now I don't take being healthy for granted.

I take medication to control the cholesterol.

I eat differently. I tend to eat more lentils, fish and white meat. I have replaced full fat with low fat milk. I haven't eaten a pizza since 1999!

There are many life changes you can make. Making simple changes to our diet is easy and makes a real difference."

Find out more at [bhf.org.uk/ten](https://www.bhf.org.uk/ten)



Find out more

To find out more go to [bhf.org.uk/ten](https://www.bhf.org.uk/ten) or ring the BHF Heart Helpline on 0300 330 3311.

Lines are open 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday at a similar cost to 01 or 02 numbers.

Your doctor or nurse should be able to give you more information about cholesterol.

Join us in the fight for every heartbeat

For 50 years the British Heart Foundation has been funding life-saving heart research.

From babies with heart problems to the mums, dads and grandparents who survive a heart attack, so many people need our help.

But we need your support to continue the fight against heart disease. Visit [bhf.org.uk](https://www.bhf.org.uk) to make a donation or find out more.



British Heart
Foundation

Coronary heart disease is the UK's single biggest killer.

For over 50 years we've pioneered research that's transformed the lives of people living with heart and circulatory conditions. Our work has been central to the discoveries of vital treatments that are changing the fight against heart disease.

But so many people still need our help.

From babies born with life-threatening heart problems to the many Mums, Dads and Grandparents who survive a heart attack and endure the daily battles of heart failure.

Join our fight for every heartbeat in the UK. Every pound raised, minute of your time and donation to our shops will help make a difference to people's lives.

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Lowering cholesterol

Your 10 minute challenge

Take a few minutes every day for a week to find some areas you could change to help keep your cholesterol low and your heart healthy.

You're in control. By taking the time to make small changes to your lifestyle, you can help keep your heart healthy, and change your life.

Day	How many portions of fruit / veg did you eat?	Check the labels: What foods did you eat that were high (red label) in saturated fat?	Get a move on: Make a note of any time you're active – anything from walking or gardening to swimming or team sports
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			

At the end of the week, look back over what you did and answer these questions:

Did you eat at least five portions of fruit or veg every day?

Yes No

Did you eat a lot of foods high in saturated fat during the week?

Yes No

Were you active every day?

Yes No

Choose an area to tackle to help lower your cholesterol. Put a number to it and set a date to complete it by

Example: I will eat at least five portions of fruit and veg every day for the next month.

Target date: ____ / ____ / ____