

When to check?

The Canadian Cardiovascular Society recommends that cholesterol screening begin at age 40. However, the Society indicates that anyone with any of the following risk factors should be screened regardless of age:

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Cigarette smoking
- Obesity (see weight management section)
- Family history of heart disease, especially high cholesterol, atherosclerosis, or chylomicronemia
- Inflammatory disease(s) such as systemic lupus erythematosus, rheumatoid arthritis, COPD, inflammatory bowel disease or psoriasis
- HIV infection treated with highly active antiretroviral therapy
- Clinical signs of high cholesterol such as xanthomas, xanthelasmata, or premature arcus cornealis
- Chronic kidney disease
- Erectile dysfunction

Based on the results of your initial test, your doctor can advise you on how frequently you should be screened.

What kind of screening is this?

A small sample of blood will be drawn from your arm, and then analyzed in a laboratory. You will need to fast (avoid consuming food and beverages for approximately 9 to 12 hours) before your blood test. The test will determine the amounts of total cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol, HDL (good) cholesterol, total cholesterol/HDL cholesterol ratio, and triglycerides in your blood. Note: These are only guidelines; individual risk factors, age and health history determine what target level is normal for each individual. Talk to your doctor about what is normal for you.

Why?

High cholesterol can lead to heart disease. About 40% of Canadians have high blood cholesterol. Cholesterol is a soft, wax-like fatty substance found in all parts of the body. Your body needs a little bit of cholesterol to work properly. In fact, the body needs it to build cell membranes, and to produce vitamin D and hormones. However, too much cholesterol can clog your arteries and lead to diseases such as stroke, coronary artery disease, and heart attack.

What to tell your doctor:

1. Any family history of heart disease, including stroke, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, angina, etc.
2. All pre-existing health conditions, such as diabetes or chronic kidney disease.
3. Any medications you are taking, including over-the-counter medications, prescription drugs, vitamins, supplements, and natural health products.
4. Any lifestyle variables such as dietary routine, physical activity level, daily stressors, alcohol use, drug use, smoking, etc.