

Cholesterol

Use this guide to help you talk to your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse about your cholesterol medicines. The guide lists all of the FDA-approved products now available to treat this condition. You will also find some general information to help you use your medicines wisely.



Cholesterol is a kind of fat in your blood. Your body makes its own cholesterol but you also get it from the foods you eat like meat, potato chips, cookies, and eggs. Some people have too much cholesterol in their blood.

Cholesterol can build up on the inside of the blood vessels of your heart. If too much cholesterol builds up, then the blood cannot flow through to your heart. This can cause a heart attack.

Most people do not have any signs of high cholesterol. The only way to know for sure is to go to the doctor and ask for a cholesterol test.

If your doctor tells you that you have high cholesterol, there are things you can do to lower your cholesterol. You can make changes to your diet and exercise at least 30 minutes most days. There are also medicines you can take to help lower your cholesterol.

Use this guide to help you talk to your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse about how to best control your cholesterol. This guide lists the different kinds of medicines to control cholesterol. Ask your health care provider to tell you about all of the risks and benefits of taking your cholesterol medicine.

Did you know?

- High cholesterol can raise your chance of having heart attacks and heart disease.
- Women over age 20 should have their cholesterol checked by a doctor.
- Most people do not show any signs of having high cholesterol.
- Sometimes cholesterol can build up in your heart and cause chest pains.
- You can find out your cholesterol number by getting a simple blood test.
- Your total cholesterol number should be under 200.

Medicines to Control Cholesterol

There are different kinds of medicines to control cholesterol.

- **HMG-CoA Reductase Inhibitors** (also called **Statins**)
- **Bile Acid Sequestrants**
- **Fibrates**
- **Niacin**
- **Cholesterol Absorption Inhibitors**
- **Omega-3 Fatty Acid**
- **Combination Medicines**

There are many different medicines in each group. These medicines are listed on the next few pages. You will also find some general information about the safety warnings and side effects for the different kinds of medicine to control cholesterol. This guide only talks about some of the risks of taking these medicines. Talk to your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse about all of the risks of taking your medicine.

Write down the important facts about your medicine here.

HMG-CoA Reductase Inhibitors (also called **Statins**)

Brand Name	Generic Name
Altoprev	Lovastatin
Crestor	Rosuvastatin
Lescol	Fluvastatin
Lipitor	Atorvastatin
Livalo	Pitavastatin
Mevacor	Lovastatin
Pravachol	Pravastatin
Zocor	Simvastatin

For up-to-date information about the risks and side effects for each drug
Check <http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/drugsatfda/>

Statins: What You Should Know

Warnings

- Do not use these medicines if you have liver disease.
- Do not use these medicines if you are pregnant or nursing.
- Use these medicines with caution if you are also taking Gemfibrozil, Fenofibrates, Amiodarone, Verapamil, or blood thinners (anticoagulants).
- People who use some HIV medicines, birth control pills (oral contraceptives), Nefazodone, and niacin should talk to their doctor about the specific risks of using Statins.
- Drinking a quart or more of grapefruit juice everyday may affect these “Statin” medicines.

Common Side Effects

- Gas
- Dizziness
- Constipation
- Headache
- Diarrhea
- Upset Stomach

Warning Signs

Call your doctor if you have any of these signs:

- Fever
- Dark Urine
- Muscle Pain or Weakness that happens without a good reason (like exercise or injury)

Bile Acid Sequestrants

Brand Name	Generic Name
Colestid	Colestipol
LoCholest (oral powder)	Cholestyramine
Prevalite (oral powder)	Cholestyramine
Questran (oral powder)	Cholestyramine
Welchol	Colesevelam

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Check <http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/drugsatfda/>

Bile Acid Sequestrants: What You Should Know

Warnings

- Do not use these drugs if you have problems with your liver or gallbladder.
- People who have bleeding problems, heart disease, stomach ulcers, kidney disease, or an under-active thyroid should talk to their doctor about the risks of taking these medicines.
- People who take Spironolactone should talk to their doctor before taking Colestipol (Colestid).

Common Side Effects

- Heartburn
- Constipation
- Gas
- Indigestion
- Nausea

Warning Signs

Call your doctor if you have any of these signs:

- Stomach Pain
- Vomiting
- Sudden Weight Loss
- Unusual Bleeding From Gums or Rectum

Fibrates

Brand Name	Generic Name
Antara	Fenofibrate
Fenoglide	Fenofibrate
Lipofen	Fenofibrate
Lopid	Gemfibrozil
Tricor	Fenofibrate
Triglide	Fenofibrate
Trilipix	Fenofibric Acid

Fibrates: What You Should Know

Warnings

- People with kidney problems, gallbladder disease, or liver disease should not use these drugs.
- Talk to your doctor before taking other medicines to control cholesterol called “Statins” (HMG-CoA Reductase Inhibitors).
- Pregnant women or women who are breastfeeding should talk to their doctor about the risks of taking these drugs.
- People who take diabetes medicines or blood thinners (anticoagulants) should talk to their doctor about the risks of taking these drugs.

Common Side Effects

- Headache
- Constipation or Diarrhea
- Dizziness
- Stomach Pain

Warning Signs

Call your doctor if you have any of these signs:

- Muscle Pain
- Weakness
- Jaundice (Skin or Eyes Look Yellow)

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Niacin

Brand Name	Generic Name
Niaspan	Niacin Nicotinic Acid

Niacin: What You Should Know

Warnings

- Do not use Niaspan if you have liver disease or if you are taking an immediate-release niacin pill.
- Do not use Niaspan if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- People who are taking aspirin, high blood pressure medicines, HMG CoA Reductase Inhibitors (“Statins”), or medicines to lower bile acid should talk to their doctor about the risks of taking Niacin (Niaspan).
- People with kidney disease, peptic ulcer, diabetes, or chest pain should talk to their doctor about the risks of taking this drug.
- People who have had a heart attack or gout should talk to their doctor about the risks of taking this drug.

Common Side Effects

- Headache
- Upset Stomach
- Heartburn
- Diarrhea
- Flushing (Redness of the Face or Neck)

Warning Signs

Call your doctor if you have any of these signs:

- Fast Heartbeat
- Fainting
- Dizziness
- Jaundice (Skin or Eyes Look Yellow)

Cholesterol Absorption Inhibitors

Brand Name	Generic Name
Zetia	Ezetimibe

Other Drugs: What You Should Know

Warnings

- Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should not take Zetia with another cholesterol medicine.
- People who have liver disease should not take Zetia with another cholesterol medicine.
- Use caution if you are taking blood thinners (anticoagulants).

Common Side Effects

- Feeling Tired
- Stomach Pain

Warning Signs

Call your doctor if you have any of these signs:

- Muscle Pain, Tenderness, or Weakness
- Stomach Pain
- Swelling of the Face or Lips
- Severe Itching

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Omega-3 Fatty Acid

Brand Name	Generic Name
Lovaza	Omega-3 Acid Ethyl Esters

Warnings

- Women who are breastfeeding, pregnant or planning to become pregnant should talk to their doctor before taking Lovaza.
- Tell your doctor if you have diabetes or liver, thyroid or pancreas problems.
- Tell your doctor if you are allergic to fish.
- Tell your doctor if you drink more than 2 glasses of alcohol each day.
- Tell your doctor if you take blood thinners or anticoagulants including aspirin, warfarin, coumarin, and clopidogrel (Plavix).

Common Side Effects

- Burping
- Infection
- Feeling like you have the flu
- Upset stomach
- Change in your sense of taste
- Back pain
- Skin rash

Other Side Effects

Lovaza may affect certain blood tests.

- Test to check your liver (ALT)
- Test to check your cholesterol (LDL-C)

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Combination Medicines

Brand Name	Generic Name
Advicor	Niacin and Lovastatin
Simcor	Niacin and Simvastatin
Vytorin	Ezetimibe and Simvastatin

Combination Drugs: What You Should Know

Warnings

- Do not take Vytorin or Advicor if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- Do not take Vytorin if you have liver disease.
- People taking Gemfibrozil (Lopid), Fenofibrate (Tricor), high blood pressure medicines, Protease Inhibitors (medicines to treat HIV), or blood thinners (anticoagulants) should use caution when taking these drugs.
- Drinking a quart or more of grapefruit juice everyday may affect these drugs.

Common Side Effects

- Headache
- Flushing (Redness of the Face or Neck) - (Advicor and Simcor)
- Upset Stomach

Warning Signs

Call your doctor if you have any of these signs:

- Dark Urine
- Stomach Pain
- Muscle Pain, Tenderness or Weakness that happens without a good reason (like exercise or injury)
- Jaundice (Skin or Eyes Look Yellow)

Other Combination Medicines

Brand Name	Generic Name
Caduet	Amlodipine and Atorvastatin

Caduet is used to treat people who have both high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Warnings

- Do not take Caduet if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant.
- Do not take Caduet if you are breastfeeding.
- Do not take Caduet if you have liver problems.

Common Side Effects

- Swelling of the Legs or Ankles (edema)
- Muscle or Joint Pain
- Headache
- Diarrhea or Constipation
- Feeling Dizzy
- Feeling Tired or Sleepy
- Gas
- Rash
- Nausea
- Stomach Pain
- Fast or Irregular Heartbeat
- Face feels Hot or Warm (flushing)

Warning Signs

Call your doctor if you have any of these signs:

- Muscle Problems like Weakness, Tenderness, or Pain that happens without a good reason (like exercise or injury)
- Brown or Dark-colored Urine
- Skin or Eyes look Yellow (jaundice)
- Feel More Tired than Usual

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Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What drugs am I taking?

- What are the side effects?

- What other prescription drugs should I avoid while taking my medicines?

- What foods, herbs, or over-the-counter medicines should I avoid?

- When should I take each drug? How many times a day do I take each drug?

- Can I take my medicines if I am pregnant or nursing?

Good vs. Bad Cholesterol

Not all cholesterol in your blood is bad for you. There are three kinds of blood cholesterol that you should know about: HDL (good cholesterol), LDL, (bad cholesterol), and triglycerides. Check below to learn more about the three kinds of cholesterol.

	Good Cholesterol	Bad Cholesterol
What is it called?	HDL	LDL
What does it do to your heart?	Helps to keep the arteries from clogging up Protects against heart disease	Builds up and blocks your arteries Helps to cause heart disease
What should your cholesterol number be?	Good level = 60mg/dL or Higher	Good level = Less than 100mg/dL if you have high risk for heart disease Less than 130mg/dL if you are otherwise healthy

Triglycerides are another form of fat in your blood that can raise your risk for heart disease. You may need treatment if your triglycerides are:

- Borderline High (150-199 mg/dL)
- High (200 mg/dL or more)

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To Learn More:

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Health Information Center

Phone: 301-592-8573

[http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/infoctr/
index.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/infoctr/index.htm)

The National Women's Health Information Center

Phone: 1-800-994-WOMAN (1-800-994-
9662)

1-888-220-5446 for the hearing impaired
<http://www.4women.gov/faq/cholesterol.htm>

This guide should not be used in place of talking to your doctor or reading the label on your medicine bottle. The drug and risk information in this guide may change. Check <http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/drugsatfda/> for the latest facts on each product listed in this guide.