



DECISION AID

High cholesterol:

What are your treatment options?

Permanently high cholesterol levels increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases like heart attacks or strokes. Other risk factors include high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking, being male, increasing age, a family history and certain diseases (like rheumatoid arthritis). You can assess your own risk together with your doctor.

If your cholesterol levels could cause problems, you can take steps to lower your risk – for example, by making lifestyle changes or taking medication. The aim of this decision aid is to help you choose a suitable treatment together with your doctors.

Important: This decision aid is meant for people who **don't** have cardiovascular disease and whose high cholesterol **is not** caused by an inherited genetic defect. Other treatments are recommended in those cases.

THESE ARE THE TREATMENT OPTIONS:

- Lifestyle changes**
 - Change your diet
 - Get more exercise
 - Lose weight
- Medication (as well)**
 - Cholesterol-lowering drugs, like statins

You can read about the pros and cons of these treatments on the next pages.

You can also do your heart a big favor by not smoking tobacco and not drinking much alcohol. Getting good treatment for risk factors like high blood pressure or high blood sugar is helpful, too. Making healthier lifestyle choices is always good for you, no matter how high your cholesterol is.

MAKING AN INFORMED DECISION

This decision aid probably won't include all of the information that you need. It can help you, but you will still have to talk to a doctor. Your treatment decision will depend on personal factors, too. These include your life circumstances, other medical conditions you may have, and your expectations of the treatment.



Take the time you need to find out what you want to know and don't let anyone pressure you into choosing a certain treatment.

PROS AND CONS OF THE TREATMENT OPTIONS

	Lifestyle changes	Medication (as well)
What does the treatment involve?	<p>Some people manage to lower their cholesterol by making permanent changes to their diet, getting more exercise and losing weight.</p> <p>When it comes to changing your diet, the main aim is to eat fewer saturated fatty acids. These are mostly found in animal products but they're also found in palm fat and coconut oil.</p>	<p>If you decide to take medication, you'll usually be given a statin. Statins are by far the most commonly prescribed cholesterol-lowering medications and they're also the best studied type of cholesterol-lowering medication.</p> <p>You typically take one statin tablet per day over a long period of time.</p>
Who is the treatment suitable for?	<p>For most people with high cholesterol. But making permanent lifestyle changes isn't easy. You have to keep up the motivation.</p>	<p>Mainly for people with high cholesterol and an increased risk of cardiovascular disease. It is best to combine cholesterol-lowering drugs with healthy lifestyle habits.</p>
How much can the treatment help?	<p>Experts believe that diseases like heart attacks can be prevented by making permanent lifestyle changes. But it's difficult to investigate that in good-quality research.</p> <p>Sometimes it's difficult to make the lifestyle changes needed to lower your cholesterol enough. That might be because of your work, an illness or your home life.</p>	<p>Statins decrease the risk of diseases like heart attacks and increase life expectancy. This has been proven in many large studies. What isn't clear is whether people who are older than 75 and don't have a cardiovascular disease benefit from starting to take statins.</p> <p>The potential benefits of taking this medication will depend on any risk factors you have. The higher your risk of cardiovascular disease, the more likely you are to benefit. You can assess your own personal risk together with your doctor.</p>
What are the possible disadvantages of the treatment?	<p>Making changes to your lifestyle doesn't typically have any disadvantages for your health. But some people feel it has a negative impact on their quality of life.</p>	<p>Statins cause muscle ache or muscle weakness in around 1 out of 100 people. They can also slightly increase your blood sugar. This doesn't usually affect your health though. Serious side effects are very rare.</p>

YOUR DECISION

You can now weigh the pros and cons of the different treatments for yourself. Which of them are better suited to you and your life circumstances, and which of them aren't?

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU?

You can use this table to note the main issues for you when considering the options. Which of them will affect your decision? How important are they to you? Mark the statements that apply to you, and add any thoughts of your own. Ranking the statements could help: For instance, you could mark the statements that are especially important to you with a 1, those that are a little less important with a 2, and so on.

Which statements apply to you?		Ranking (1, 2, ...)
I'm very worried about diseases like a heart attack or stroke.	<input type="radio"/>	
My LDL cholesterol is only a little bit too high.	<input type="radio"/>	
I find it hard to make lifestyle changes.	<input type="radio"/>	
I'd like to avoid taking medication if possible and take other steps to improve my health myself.	<input type="radio"/>	
My LDL cholesterol is very high.	<input type="radio"/>	
I don't mind taking one tablet a day over a long period of time.	<input type="radio"/>	
I have other risk factors for heart disease, too.	<input type="radio"/>	
	<input type="radio"/>	
	<input type="radio"/>	
	<input type="radio"/>	

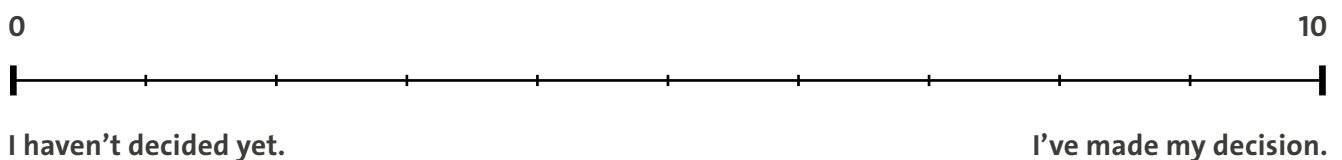
WHICH TREATMENT WOULD YOU CONSIDER?

You can use this table to assess the different treatments. Mark the ones you would consider and write down what you like and don't like about them.

Which treatment would you consider?		What do you like about it?	What don't you like about it?
Lifestyle changes	<input type="radio"/>		
Medication (as well)	<input type="radio"/>		

HOW FAR HAVE YOU GOT WITH YOUR DECISION?

You can use this section to record how far along you are in your decision-making process. Mark where you are on a scale of 0 to 10.



If you still aren't sure and need more help, you can find some tips and more information on the following pages.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED IN ORDER TO MAKE A DECISION?

With all the different pros and cons to consider, it can be hard to choose a treatment. Then the following might help:

Knowledge If you feel that you don't have enough information:	<input type="checkbox"/> Write down any questions you still have (see below). <input type="checkbox"/> Take this decision aid and your list of questions along to your next appointment and talk about them with your doctor. <input type="checkbox"/> Get more information (for example, on the internet) but make sure your sources are reliable! <input type="checkbox"/> Get a second medical opinion. You can find out more about this option on the next page.
Support If you feel you need more support:	<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss the various options with a trusted person (for instance, with your doctor, someone in your family, or a friend). <input type="checkbox"/> Talk with people who have experienced a similar situation. <input type="checkbox"/> Contact patient advice services or a support group.




PREPARING FOR THE DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENT

Do you still have any questions or concerns? Write down your questions or your own thoughts to discuss with the doctor.

There's a list of possible questions here:

www.informedhealth.org/questions

YOU WILL FIND IN-DEPTH INFORMATION ABOUT THE FOLLOWING TOPICS ON THE INTERNET:

	High cholesterol and the treatment options www.informedhealth.org/high-cholesterol.html
	In brief: What is cholesterol and how does arteriosclerosis develop? www.informedhealth.org/cholesterol-and-arteriosclerosis
	Patient advice services and support groups www.informedhealth.org/support-groups-and-information-centers

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG, Germany)
www.informedhealth.org/about-us

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The format of this decision aid is based on the following:

- Ottawa Personal Decision Guide. O'Connor, Stacey, Jacobsen 2012. Ottawa Hospital Research Institute and University of Ottawa, Canada.
- MAKING SDM A REALITY – Hospital-wide shared decision making – G-BA Innovation fund 2023.
- Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG, Germany). Development of a decision aid for hysterectomy: Rapid Report; Commission P18-01. 2019.