**What is Cholesterol?**

McKenzie Kargel

Cholesterol is a substance that helps your body perform by maintaining cell membranes, aiding in digestion, and creating connections between brain cells, among other things.

**What are LDL and HDL?**

LDL is low- density lipoprotein (lipid and protein). It is often considered the “bad” cholesterol. HDL is high- density lipoprotein. It is often considered the “good” cholesterol. In reality, neither one is good or bad, but a balance is required for them to do their jobs right

**LDL**

* Transports cholesterol to the cells so that they can make membranes
* Should be less than 100 in a cholesterol test
* Contains more cholesterol than protein, making it low- density
* If there is too much of it in the bloodstream, it will stick to the walls of the blood vessels, causing blockage and formation of plaque, called atherosclerosis

**HDL**

* Transports cholesterol out of the bloodstream and back to the liver
* Should be more than 60 in a cholesterol test
* Contains more protein and less cholesterol, making it high- density
* Because of its high density, HDL moves easily through the bloodstream, picking up excess LDL and bringing it back to the liver for breakdown. For this reason, HDL can help protect against heart disease.

**Why is This Important?**

* While HDL and LDL are both necessary to maintain your body, high levels of LDL can be very bad for you, causing atherosclerosis, heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.
* Doctors need to measure these numbers to ensure that cholesterol is being transported around your body correctly.

**What Can I Do?**

* Eating a diet full of fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and low in fatty foods and red meat can reduce your risk of unhealthy levels of cholesterol
* Diets high in unsaturated, saturated, and trans fats can boost LDL levels and lead to overall bad health.
* Some people have a condition called familial hypercholesterolemia, in which a genetic mutation causes them to have unhealthy levels of cholesterol, no matter how they eat. If this is the case for you, talk to your doctor and he or she will make a treatment plan.

**What Else Should I Watch for?**

* Doctors often test the concentration of triglycerides, the fat we get from our food, at the same time that they test for cholesterol