

# Familial Hypercholesterolemia: What you need to know



## What is Familial Hypercholesterolemia (FH)?

FH is a hereditary high blood cholesterol problem. If a parent has the FH gene, there is a 1 in 2 chance that their child will have FH.

If you have FH, your liver cannot clear cholesterol from your blood in the usual way.

High blood cholesterol levels can lead to blocked arteries. These blockages can cause a heart attack, a stroke or other circulation problems. This can happen at a young age in people who have FH, especially if they are not treated with medicine.

About 1 in 250 people has FH. While many people have high blood cholesterol levels, people with FH have extremely high levels.

## Reasons why your nurse or doctor may want to test you for FH:

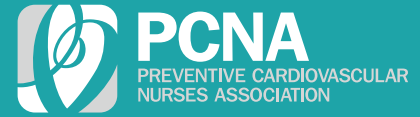
- If your LDL “bad” cholesterol is 190 or higher. In children or teenagers, if LDL is 160 or higher.
- If you or other family members have had a heart attack or stroke when they were under the age of 50.
- If your health care provider can see signs of cholesterol deposits around your eyes, Achilles tendons or elbows when they examine you.

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## If you have FH: what you can do

- While not curable, FH is treatable, and you can lead a full life.
- Ask questions if there is something you don’t understand.
- Take your medicine as prescribed. Cholesterol-lowering medicines can prevent heart attacks, strokes, and other circulation problems.
- Ask your health care provider to help you:
  - make a plan for exercise
  - quit smoking cigarettes or e-cigarettes, or stop using smokeless tobacco
  - schedule a visit with a dietitian to help you make healthy diet changes
  - schedule an appointment with a cholesterol or lipid specialist, if needed

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## How is FH treated?

**Cholesterol-lowering medicines** are the most important part of treating FH, and will be needed throughout your life. They lower the very high levels of cholesterol that cannot be controlled with just a healthy diet and exercise.



Lowering your risk of a heart attack or stroke is important. In addition to eating healthy and staying active, make sure to have your blood pressure and blood sugar checked. Take all your medicines as prescribed.

## If I have FH, what does this mean for the people in my family?

- If you have FH, your children, parents, brothers and sisters each have a 1 in 2 chance of having FH.
- Tell your parents and siblings that you have FH and to have their cholesterol levels checked. Have your children's levels checked. The more quickly FH is found, the earlier you can reduce risk of a heart attack or stroke.
- New guidelines recommend that all children have their cholesterol levels measured between ages 9 and 11, and again between ages 17 and 21. Certain children, including those who have a parent or sibling with FH, should have their cholesterol levels measured earlier—as young as age 2.

## Important things to remember about FH

- If you have FH, you will need regular medical follow up and prescription medicines to lower your blood cholesterol for your lifetime.
- If you have FH, a healthy diet and physical activity, while important, are not enough to lower your cholesterol level.
- Treating your blood cholesterol level and other heart disease risk factors will lower your risk of heart attack, stroke and other circulation problems.

## FH Resources

- The non-profit FH Foundation is dedicated to serving those with FH. Find a specialist, get support, and improve your understanding of FH. [thefhfoundation.com](http://thefhfoundation.com)
- The Foundation of the National Lipid Association focuses on education and research. Find lipid specialists near you, educational resources and information at [learnyourlipids.com](http://learnyourlipids.com).
- [pcna.net/clinical/FH](http://pcna.net/clinical/FH)

