

# More than 3 in 10 Delaware Adults Report High Cholesterol in 2017

In 2017, **34.6 percent** of Delaware residents age 18 years and older reported they **had been diagnosed with high cholesterol**. That means more than 225,200 Delaware adults know they have high cholesterol, according to the Delaware Behavioral Risk Survey (BRFS).

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance in the blood, and it is needed by the body to build healthy cells. However, when there is too much cholesterol in the blood, it can build up in the arteries reducing the space for blood to flow, causing less blood to flow to the heart and other organs.

## Prevalence of High Cholesterol

Trend in Adult High Cholesterol Prevalence in Delaware:

- **2011 = 40.6 percent**
- **2013 = 40.6 percent**
- **2015 = 39.1 percent**
- **2017 = 34.6 percent\***

\* The significantly lower prevalence in 2017 may, at least in part, be a result of a change in the way the cholesterol questions were asked. This may require a break in the trend line, with 2017 as the new baseline.

The BRFS asks about cholesterol every other year.

The prevalence of high cholesterol **increases with age**. Only 18.1 percent of Delaware adults age 18-44 have been told they have high cholesterol. However, 34.5 percent of adults age 45-54, 44.7 percent of adults age 55-64, and 50.5 percent of adults age 65 years and older have been told they have high cholesterol. These increases are statistically significant.

Women have a lower prevalence of high cholesterol compared to men; **30.2 percent** of Delaware women have been told they have high cholesterol, compared to **35.1 percent** of men.

Non-Hispanic white Delawareans reported having slightly higher prevalence of high cholesterol (35.2 percent) than African American adults (30.6 percent). However, this difference was not statistically significant.

There was very little difference in the prevalence of high cholesterol among Delaware adults with differing educational levels: 34 percent of Delaware adults with less than a high school diploma reported having high cholesterol, 33.6 percent of Delaware adults with a high school diploma reported having high cholesterol, 32.4 percent of Delaware adults with some post high school education reported having high cholesterol, and 31.2 percent of Delaware adults with a college degree reported having high cholesterol.

There also were no statistically significant differences in the prevalence of diagnosed high cholesterol among Delaware adults with different annual household incomes. And there were no differences in prevalence of high cholesterol observed between Delaware adults who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) and heterosexual gender-conforming Delaware adults.

## Testing for Blood Cholesterol

The National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) recommends adults age 20 and older should have their cholesterol checked every 5 years. Of Delaware adults aged 20 years and older, **94.0 percent** reported having their blood cholesterol level tested within the last five years.

For those with borderline or high cholesterol, recommendations on how often a cholesterol test is required should be made by a health care professional.

For those with coronary heart disease, a cholesterol test is recommended annually. Of Delaware adults with coronary heart disease, **97.5 percent** reported having their cholesterol checked within the last five years.

## Risk Factors

There are several risk factors for high cholesterol, including existing health conditions, behavioral risks, and family history or genetics.

Diabetes is known to be associated with high cholesterol. Of Delaware adults who have diabetes, **63.5 percent** also have high cholesterol. When adjusted for other demographic characteristics and risk factors, Delaware adults with diabetes were still more likely to have high cholesterol than adults without diabetes.

Behavioral risk factors include poor diet, physical inactivity, obesity, smoking, and excessive drinking.

Prevalence of high cholesterol among adults who are physically inactive is **39.5 percent**; and the prevalence among obese adults is **43 percent**. Adults who smoke cigarettes have a high cholesterol prevalence of **35.8 percent**. Those who report chronic heavy alcohol use have a high cholesterol prevalence of **37.3 percent**. The highest prevalence (**44.1 percent**) is among adults with disabilities. The underlying causes of those disabilities may be conditions which increase the risk for high cholesterol.

Family history and genetics are likely to play a role in whether an individual develops high cholesterol. For example, the risk of high cholesterol can increase when someone who has a family history of hypertension also engages in other behavioral risk factors, such as physical inactivity.

**Complications:** High cholesterol is a risk factor for heart disease. Some of the conditions to which high cholesterol can contribute include **heart attack, angina or chest pain, stroke, and aortic aneurysm**.

## What You Can Do:

Take medicines as prescribed by your doctor. There are medications which can help lower or control high cholesterol, decreasing your risk of complications. If a medication is prescribed to you, take it as instructed. If your risk factors change (for example, if you start an exercise

program or change your diet), tell your doctor or health care team because your medication may need to be adjusted.

## **Make Healthy Lifestyle Changes**

- **Manage any health conditions** you may have. If you need help learning to manage any chronic disease with which you may have been diagnosed, the Division of Public Health offers free classes. A class schedule is available [the HealthyDelaware.org website](https://www.healthyledelaware.org).
- Eat a diet high in vegetables and fruits, and **low in saturated fats, refined carbohydrates, and sugars**. Eat primarily high nutrient, low-calorie foods.
- Maintain a **healthy weight**.
- Be **physically active**, including both **strength-building and aerobic exercise**. Children and youth should get an hour of physical activity daily, and adults should get at least 30 minutes a day at least 5 days a week.
- **Don't smoke**. If you don't smoke, don't start. If you smoke, try to quit; and don't expose others to your second-hand smoke. If you need **help quitting**, call the toll-free Delaware Quitline at **1-866-409-1858**.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, **do so in moderation** — up to one per day for women or smaller adults, or up to two per day for men or larger adults. Never drink when it could put you or others at risk. Women who are pregnant should not drink alcohol.
- For **more information** regarding heart disease and other chronic diseases and their related risk factors, visit [HealthyDelaware.org](https://www.healthyledelaware.org).