

Importance of Cholesterol Education

Tips to Help Keep Your Health On Track!

Why Knowing You Have High Cholesterol Is Important?

High cholesterol affects children, young adults and older individuals and many do not even know they have it. Although high cholesterol usually does not present any noticeable symptoms, it is a major risk factor for heart disease. Cholesterol deposits on the coronary walls and causes the formation of cholesterol plaque that narrows the arteries. Once this occurs, blood flow to the heart muscle is slowed down or blocked. Since blood carries oxygen to the heart, if sufficient blood and oxygen cannot reach your heart, the result may be a heart attack. As a result, heart disease causes close to 600,000 deaths annually and is the most common cause of death in the United States. ⁽¹⁾

What is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a fatty chemical found mainly in foods that come from animals and is an important part of the outer membrane of the cells in the body. Cholesterol contains two types of lipoproteins; one is named LDL (low-density lipoprotein) and the other is known as HDL (high-density lipoprotein). LDL is the carrier of cholesterol in the blood and is the main cause of the dangerous fatty buildup in the arteries. And because high levels of LDL are associated with an increased risk of coronary heart disease, it is known as the “bad” cholesterol. HDL, known as the “good” cholesterol, transports blood back to the liver where it can be eliminated while also helping to prevent cholesterol buildup in the blood vessels. ⁽¹⁾

What Factors Help Determine a High/Low LDL Cholesterol Level?

Over 102 million American adults over the age of 20 have total cholesterol levels at or above 200 mg/dl which is considered to be in the unhealthy range. ⁽²⁾ Further, of these 102 million individuals, more than 35 million have levels higher than 240 mg/dl which now puts them at high risk for coronary heart disease. ⁽²⁾ There are many factors which help determine a high or low LDL level. This level may be affected by not just what we eat but by how quickly our body produces “bad” cholesterol and disposes of it. Most of us do not realize that our bodies make all of the cholesterol it needs and we do not require any additional cholesterol from the foods we eat. The following factors contribute to the level of LDL our body will maintain: ⁽¹⁾

Heredity – Genes play a role in how high our “bad” LDL level is and affect how quickly LDL is produced and removed from blood; even without a specific genetic form of high cholesterol, genes will always influence our “bad” LDL level. ⁽¹⁾	Exercise/Physical Activity – Exercise and regular physical activity may lower “bad” cholesterol and raise “good” cholesterol levels; for adults, that means at least 1 to 2 hours of moderate activity per week. ⁽¹⁾
Diet - Two nutrients in food that cause “bad” cholesterol to rise are saturated fats from animals and cholesterol from animal products; lowering these may prevent “bad” LDL levels from rising. ⁽¹⁾	Alcohol – Although alcohol increases “good” cholesterol, it doesn’t lower “bad” cholesterol and doctors do know that alcohol damages the liver and heart muscle. ⁽¹⁾
Weight – Being overweight increases “bad” LDL levels; maintaining a healthy weight not only lowers the “bad” LDL level but also helps reduce triglycerides and raise “good” HDL levels. ⁽¹⁾	Stress – Lifestyle changes that occur due to stress (like eating foods higher in saturated fats) may contribute to higher levels of blood cholesterol in some individuals. ⁽¹⁾
Age/Sex – Prior to menopause, women generally have total cholesterol levels lower than men of the same age; after the age of 50, women often have higher levels than men of the same age. ⁽¹⁾	Medications – Medications prescribed for other medical conditions can cause high cholesterol; prior to receiving a new Rx, alert your doctor if you have high cholesterol. ⁽¹⁾

What is a Desirable Cholesterol Level?

Maintaining a desirable blood cholesterol level is very important to the prevention of heart disease. The cholesterol levels we should all be aware of are: ⁽³⁾

DESIRABLE	BORDERLINE	HIGH
Total: < 200 mg/dl	Total: 200–239 mg/dl	Total: > 240 mg/dl
LDL: < 130 mg/dl	LDL: 130–159 mg/dl	LDL: 160 mg/dl or >

*~ Monitor cholesterol levels/blood pressure ~ Eat low-fat & high-fiber foods ~
~ Maintain a healthy weight ~ Do not smoke ~ Exercise regularly ~*

(1) www.medicinenet.com; (2) www.inccrra.org; (3) www.fda.gov

This information is intended as informational only; not as a replacement for the medical advice of your physician.