



Patient Information

Tips for Lowering Your Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance produced in your liver that is also found in some foods. Although cholesterol is needed by your body, too much cholesterol can lead to serious problems, such as heart disease. Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of men and women in the United States.

Excess cholesterol builds up in the walls of your arteries. Your arteries narrow, slowing or blocking blood and oxygen trying to flow to your heart. This leads to an increased risk of heart attack. Blood and oxygen that can't get to your brain also increase your risk of stroke.

Have Your Cholesterol Tested

High cholesterol does not cause symptoms, so many people with high cholesterol don't know their levels are too high until it's too late. It's important for adults to get their cholesterol tested at least once every 5 years.

A blood test called a lipoprotein profile tells you your levels of total cholesterol, low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol and triglycerides. LDL cholesterol is called "bad" cholesterol because it's the main source of buildup and blockage in arteries, while HDL cholesterol is called "good" cholesterol because it helps clear extra cholesterol from the body. Triglycerides are a type of fat in the blood.

Your NP will be able to analyze your blood test to tell you if your levels of cholesterol are too high. Lifestyle changes, along with the possible addition of a prescription medication, can help you lower your cholesterol levels.

Risk Factors

Quite a few factors may lead to high levels of cholesterol in your body. You cannot control some of these factors. For example, high cholesterol can be hereditary, meaning it runs in families.

Age and gender may also play a role in high cholesterol levels. As men and women age, their cholesterol levels rise. Also, women's LDL cholesterol levels tend to rise after menopause.

Risk factors you can control include the following:

- Diet — Ingesting high amounts of cholesterol and saturated and trans fats in foods raises cholesterol levels.

- Weight — Being overweight or obese tends to increase cholesterol levels.

- Physical activity — A lack of physical activity may lower your level of HDL cholesterol.

- Smoking — This habit damages blood vessel walls, making them more likely to accumulate fatty deposits. Also, smoking may lower the level of HDL cholesterol in the body.

Lifestyle Changes

Maintaining a healthy diet can help you lower your cholesterol. It's important to eat less saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol. Read food labels so that you know how much fat and cholesterol you are consuming.

The following are some other healthy changes you can make:

- Eat foods with soluble fiber, such as beans, oatmeal and whole-grain cereals, which can help lower your total cholesterol level.

- Eat fish, such as salmon, mackerel or herring, which contain high amounts of omega-3 fatty acids, a polyunsaturated fat that may lower your level of triglycerides.

- Try healthy replacements, such as low-fat milk or nonfat milk instead of whole milk; egg whites or egg substitute in place of eggs; and beans, peas, lentils or tofu as a replacement for meat.

- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink, since even moderate consumption may raise HDL cholesterol levels.

- Use enhanced food products, such as margarine spreads or orange juice, that contain added plant sterols or plant stanol esters, which can reduce cholesterol.

Exercise and losing weight are also part of a healthy lifestyle. Adding physical activity 30 minutes a day on most days of the week may help raise HDL cholesterol and lower LDL cholesterol. Gradually build up the time and frequency of your exercise. And if you smoke, quit now. If you don't smoke, don't start.

Drug Treatment

Your NP may prescribe a cholesterol-lowering medication to help keep your levels in check. These drugs control high blood cholesterol but are not a cure, so you must continue to take the drugs to keep your cholesterol in a healthy range.

Additional Notes:
