
CHOLESTEROL AND YOUR HEART

Cholesterol is a soft, waxy, fat-like substance found in the blood. It is also part of every body cell. Cholesterol is used to form different hormones and other necessary substances. Your liver produces most of the cholesterol that you need and the rest comes from the foods that you eat. Only animal products contain cholesterol, e.g. meat, organ meats, poultry, seafood, dairy products (except fat free milk), and egg yolk. Foods of plant origin have no cholesterol but may contain fat e.g. nuts and seeds. Keep in mind that cholesterol is not the same as fat.

Too much cholesterol in the blood stream can clog up the arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle and lead to a heart attack. A desirable total cholesterol level should be below 200 mg/dl. Values between 201-239 is considered borderline-high and over 240 is considered high.

Your body transports fat and cholesterol in protein packages known as LIPOPROTEINS. LDL and HDL are two types of lipoproteins found in the blood. LDL is known as the “bad” cholesterol because it is responsible for depositing cholesterol in the arteries and HDL is known as the “good” cholesterol because it removes the deposited cholesterol back to the liver for disposal. To lower your “bad” cholesterol, follow a low saturated fat, low cholesterol diet. To raise your “good” cholesterol (HDL), exercise regularly, stop smoking, and lose weight if overweight. A desirable LDL cholesterol level is below 100 mg/dl and a desirable HDL cholesterol level is above 40 mg/dl. Persons with diabetes or heart disease should keep their LDL levels below 70 mg/dl.

Diets high in both fat and cholesterol play a major role in raising blood cholesterol levels. Fat, especially saturated fat (butter, lard, chicken fat, coconut oil, and palm oil) and trans fat (hydrogenated vegetable oils) both

raise blood cholesterol. The first step in lowering blood cholesterol level should always be a change in your diet. Here are some suggestions to help you cut down on your fat and cholesterol intake:

1. Choose lean meat, chicken breast, and most seafood. Include fish 2 times a week.
2. Limit daily fat intake of meat, poultry, and seafood to 6 oz. Remove skin and all visible fats.
3. Choose fat free or 1% low fat dairy products.
4. Eat less high saturated fat foods, e.g. sausage, roast pork, roast duck, pig's feet, chicken feet, chicken wings, fried foods, coconut milk, and pastries.
5. Eat less high cholesterol foods, e.g. organ meats (liver, kidney, and brain), egg yolks, shrimps, and squid.
6. Choose vegetable oil such as canola, olive, and safflower oil but limit the amount used (even though vegetable oil is cholesterol-free, it is 100% fat!)
7. Use low fat cooking methods, e.g. steaming, boiling, baking, and braising.
8. Eat more high fiber foods, e.g. oatmeal, whole wheat bread, brown rice, fruits, vegetables, and dried beans.

If you do not know what your cholesterol level is, discuss this with your doctor on your next visit. Remember, keeping your cholesterol level under control lowers your chance of developing heart disease.