

Cholesterol: What Are The Risks?

Cholesterol is a waxy substance found in all parts of your body. It helps make cell membranes, some hormones, bile acids, and vitamin D. Cholesterol comes from two sources: your body, and to a lesser extent, the foods you eat. Blood cholesterol is made in your liver. Your liver makes all the cholesterol your body needs. Dietary cholesterol comes from animal foods like meats, whole milk dairy foods, egg yolks, poultry, and fish. Food from plants do not have any dietary cholesterol. Eating too much dietary cholesterol can make your blood cholesterol go up.

Cholesterol is a risk factor for heart disease. Risk factors are traits or habits that make a person more likely to develop a disease. Some risk factors for heart problems can be changed by changing your lifestyle. Others cannot be changed.

The three biggest risk factors for cardiovascular disease that you can control are cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, and high blood cholesterol. See below for complete listing of risk factors. Even just one risk factor will raise your chances of having heart-related problems. But the more risk factors you have the more likely you are to develop cardiovascular diseases - and the more concerned you should be about protecting your heart health.

When you have too much cholesterol in your blood, the excess builds up on the walls of the arteries that carry blood to the heart. It narrows the arteries and can slow down or block blood flow to the heart resulting in chest pain (angina) or heart attack (myocardial infarction). The higher your blood cholesterol, the greater your chance of this build up.

RISK FACTORS FOR HEART DISEASE:

Factors You Can Do Something About:

- Cigarette smoking
- High cholesterol (high total cholesterol and high LDL-cholesterol)
- Low HDL cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Physical inactivity

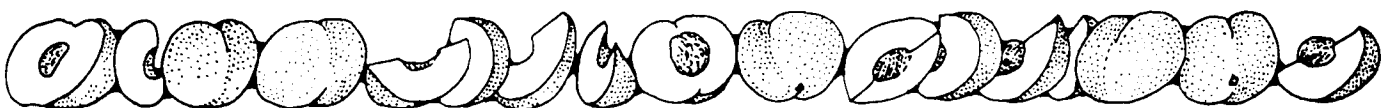
Factors You Cannot Control:

- Age
45 years or older for men
55 years or older for women
- Family history of early heart disease (heart attack or sudden death)
Father or brother stricken before the age of 55
Mother or sister stricken before the age of 65

Two types of lipoprotein affect your risk of heart disease:

Cholesterol travels in the blood in packages called lipoprotein. Just like oil and water don't mix, cholesterol and blood do not mix. So, in order to be able to travel in the blood stream, the cholesterol made in the liver is coated with a layer of protein making a lipoprotein.

- o Low-density protein (LDLs), the "bad" cholesterol. LDLs carry most of the cholesterol in the blood, and the cholesterol and fat from LDLs are the main source of dangerous buildup and blockage in the arteries. Thus, the more LDL-cholesterol you have in your blood, the greater your risk of heart disease.
- o High-density lipoprotein (HDLs), the "good" cholesterol. HDLs carry some of the cholesterol in the blood, but this cholesterol goes back to the liver, which leads to its removal from the body. So HDLs help keep cholesterol from building up in the walls of the arteries. If your level of good cholesterol is low, your risk of heart disease is greater. A small group of the population has a normal total cholesterol, but a low HDL (below 35 mg/dL). It is a good idea to have your primary physician check a total lipid panel every 5 years to monitor your LDL and HDL levels.



What Makes Blood Cholesterol High or Low:

Why do some people have too much cholesterol in their blood? Many factors help determine whether your blood cholesterol level is high or low. The following factors are the most important:

Heredity: Your genes partly determine the amount of cholesterol your body makes, and high blood cholesterol can run in families.

Diet: Two nutrients in the foods you eat make your blood cholesterol level go up; saturated fat, a type of fat found mostly in foods that come from animals; and cholesterol, which comes only from animal products. Saturated fat raises your cholesterol level more than anything else in the diet. Reducing the amounts of saturated fat and cholesterol you eat is an important step in reducing your blood cholesterol levels.

Weight: Excess weight tends to increase your blood cholesterol level. If you are overweight and have a high blood cholesterol, losing weight may help you lower it.

Physical activity/exercise: Regular physical activity may help to lower LDL-cholesterol and raise HDL-cholesterol levels.

Age and sex: Before menopause, women have total cholesterol levels that are lower than those of men the same age. Pregnancy raises blood cholesterol levels in many women, but blood cholesterol levels should return to normal about 20 weeks after delivery. As women and men get older, their blood cholesterol levels rise. In women, menopause often causes an increase in their LDL-cholesterol level. Some women may benefit from taking estrogen after menopause, because estrogen lowers LDLs and raises HDLs.

Alcohol: Alcohol intake increases HDL cholesterol. However, doctors don't know whether it also reduces the risk of heart disease. Drinking too much alcohol can certainly damage the liver and heart muscle and cause other health problems. Because of these risks, you should not drink alcoholic beverages to prevent heart disease.

Stress: Stress over the long term has not been shown to raise blood cholesterol levels. It's possible the main problem with stress may be how it affects your habits. For example, when some people are under stress, they console themselves by eating fatty foods. The effects of stress on cholesterol need further study.

Three Steps to reducing High Cholesterol Levels:

1) Eat a low fat diet:

- o 7-10 percent of the days' calories from saturated fat
- o 30 percent or less of the days' total calories from fat
- o Less than 300 milligrams of dietary cholesterol a day
- o Just enough calories to achieve and maintain a healthy weight

You may want to ask a registered dietician or your doctor for further information on a recommended diet. Call LIVE FOR LIFE® for information on free nutrition consults,

2) Be more physically active. Call LIVE FOR LIFE for information on our fitness club, 916.434.1111.

3) Lose weight if you are over weight.

