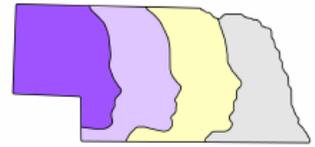


Cholesterol: What You Should Know



High cholesterol can affect anyone. It's a serious condition that increases the risk for heart disease, the number one killer of Americans- women and men. The higher your cholesterol, the greater your risk of heart disease.

High cholesterol itself does not cause symptoms; so many people are unaware that their cholesterol level is too high. It is important to find out your cholesterol numbers and visit with your healthcare provider about how to reduce your risk of heart disease.

The good news is that you can prevent and control high cholesterol. If you have high cholesterol, there are steps you can take to lower it and protect your heart health.

What Is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a soft, fat-like, waxy substance found in the bloodstream and in all your body's cells. It's normal to have cholesterol. It's an important part of a healthy body because it's used for producing cell membranes and some hormones, and serves other needed bodily functions. But too much cholesterol in the blood is a major risk for coronary heart disease, which leads to heart attack. It's also a risk factor for stroke.

You get cholesterol in two ways. Your body makes some of it, and the rest comes from cholesterol in animal products that you eat, such as meats, poultry, fish, eggs, butter, cheese and whole milk. Food from plants – like fruits, vegetables and cereals – doesn't have cholesterol. Some foods that don't contain animal products may contain trans fats, which cause your body to make more cholesterol. Foods with saturated fats also cause the body to make more cholesterol.

Cholesterol and other fats can't dissolve in the blood. They have to be transported to and from the cells by special carriers called lipoproteins. There are two kinds that you need to know about. Low-density lipoprotein, or LDL, is known as the "bad" cholesterol. Too much LDL cholesterol can clog your arteries, increasing your risk of heart attack and stroke. High-density lipoprotein, or HDL, is known as the "good" cholesterol. Your body makes HDL cholesterol for your protection. It carries cholesterol away from your arteries. Studies suggest that high levels of HDL cholesterol reduce your risk of heart attack.

What Do Cholesterol Numbers Mean?

<u>Total Cholesterol Level</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>LDL Cholesterol Level</u>	<u>Category</u>
• Less than 200 mg/dL	Desirable	• Less than 130 mg/dL	Desirable
• 200-239 mg/dL	Borderline High	• 130-159 mg/dL	Borderline High
• Above 240 mg/dL	High	• Above 160 mg/dL	High

HDL (good) cholesterol protects against heart disease, so for HDL, higher numbers are better. A level less than 40mg/dL is low and considered a major risk for heart disease. HDL levels of 60 mg/dL or more help to lower your risk. Triglycerides, another form of fat in your blood, can also raise heart disease risk. Levels that are borderline high (150-199 mg/dL) or high (200 mg/dL or more) may need treatment. *You should discuss your cholesterol numbers with your health care provider.*

Please see reverse

What Affects Cholesterol Levels?

A variety of things can affect cholesterol levels. These are areas you can make changes to improve your health:

- **Diet**--Saturated fat and cholesterol in the food you eat make your blood cholesterol level go up. Saturated fat is the main culprit, but cholesterol in foods also matters. Reducing the amount of saturated fat and cholesterol in your diet helps lower your blood cholesterol level.
- **Weight**-- Being overweight is a risk factor for heart disease. It also tends to increase your cholesterol. Losing weight can help lower your LDL and total cholesterol levels, as well as raise your HDL and lower your triglyceride levels.
- **Physical Activity**--Not being physically active is a risk factor for heart disease. Regular physical activity can help lower LDL (bad) cholesterol and raise HDL (good) cholesterol levels. It also helps you lose weight. You should try to be physically active for 30 minutes on most, if not all, days.

There are also things you can not do anything about that may affect your cholesterol levels:

- **Age and Gender**-- As women and men get older, their cholesterol levels rise. Before the age of menopause, women have lower total cholesterol levels than men of the same age. After the age of menopause, women's LDL levels tend to rise.
- **Heredity**-- Your genes partly determine how much cholesterol your body makes. High blood cholesterol can run in families.

What Else Can You Do To Stay Heart Healthy?

Everyone can improve their heart health! Here's how:

- Keeping a healthy weight, lose weight if you are overweight
- Being physically active
- Following a healthy eating plan that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy foods.
- Choosing and preparing foods with less salt and sodium
- Drinking alcohol in moderation if you drink.

Another important measure for your health is to not smoke. Cigarette smoking increases your risk of heart attack and stroke and stopping is one of the most important things you can do for yourself and your family.

Additional Resources

Nebraska Office of Women's Health

www.hhss.ne.gov/womenshealth

American Heart Association

www.americanheart.org

National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute

www.nhlbi.nih.gov

For More Information:

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