

eHouseCall

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A Monthly Electronic Newsletter from HealthLink

Doctor's Bag



by Robert Sorrenti, MD
Chief Medical Officer

Take Time for a Cholesterol Checkup

Taking control of cholesterol is important for everyone, young and old. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 17% of adult Americans age 20 years and older have high total cholesterol (240 mg/dL or above).

High cholesterol is one of the major modifiable risk factors of heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States. Here are the others:

- ♦ Smoking
- ♦ High blood pressure
- ♦ Diabetes
- ♦ Obesity/overweight
- ♦ Physical inactivity

Three Ways to Control Cholesterol

1. Reducing the amount of saturated fat and cholesterol in your diet can help to lower your blood cholesterol level.
2. Losing weight can help lower your LDL and total cholesterol levels, as well as raise your HDL and lower your triglyceride levels.
3. Regular physical activity can help lower LDL (bad) cholesterol and raise HDL (good) cholesterol levels. It also helps you lose weight.

If you haven't had your cholesterol checked or if it has been longer than five years since your last checkup, call your doctor and schedule a screening. If your cholesterol is too high, your doctor may prescribe medications, in addition to lifestyle changes, to help bring it under control.

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JUNE

Cholesterol: How Do You Measure Up?

TYPE	DESIRABLE LEVELS	BORDERLINE LEVELS	HIGH RISK LEVELS
Total Cholesterol	Below 200	200-236	240 and Up
LDL (Bad Cholesterol)	Below 130	130-159	160 and Up
HDL (Good Cholesterol)	Above 60	60-35	Below 35
Triglycerides	Below 200	200-399	400 and Up

Where does cholesterol come from?

Cholesterol comes from your body and from food. Your liver and other cells in your body make about 75 percent of blood cholesterol. The other 25 percent comes from the food you eat.

How does cholesterol cause heart disease?

You rely on your arteries to carry blood and oxygen to the heart. Too much cholesterol in your blood builds up the walls of your arteries. Over time, this build-up causes "hardening of the arteries" – a condition that causes the arteries to become too narrow and slows or blocks the blood flow to the heart. If your heart does not receive enough blood or oxygen, you will experience chest pain. If the passageways are totally blocked, the result is a heart attack.

What are the symptoms of high cholesterol?

High blood cholesterol itself does not have symptoms – and that makes it all the more dangerous. It is important to know your cholesterol levels because lowering levels that are too high can decrease your risk of heart disease or heart attack.

When is it time for a checkup?

The American Heart Association endorses the National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) guidelines: All adults age 20 or older should have a fasting lipoprotein profile — which measures total cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol, HDL (good) cholesterol and triglycerides — once every five years.

You may need to have your cholesterol checked more often than every five years if one or more of these situations applies to you:

- ♦ Your total cholesterol is 200 mg/dL or more.
- ♦ You are a man over age 45 or a woman over age 50.
- ♦ Your HDL (good) cholesterol is less than 40 mg/dL.
- ♦ You have other risk factors for heart disease and stroke.

DidUKnow?

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a lipid – a soft, fatty substance that, in reasonable quantities, is critical to good health.

What happens when you have too much cholesterol?

Extra cholesterol builds up in the arteries and can result in angina (chest pain), heart attack and stroke.

What is considered a normal total cholesterol level?

A healthy total cholesterol level is below 200, but it is important to know your HDL, LDL and triglyceride levels as well.

What is HDL?

HDL is "good cholesterol." It helps get rid of the bad cholesterol in your blood. More is better. A healthy HDL level is 60 or above.

What is LDL?

LDL is "bad cholesterol." It builds up in the walls of the arteries. Less is better. For people without heart disease, a level below 130 is best. People with heart disease need a LDL level below 100.

What are triglycerides?

Triglycerides are the most common form of fat in the body. A healthy triglyceride level is below 200.

How can you get your cholesterol tested?

Request a fasting lipoprotein profile from your doctor. This blood test will provide accurate readings of total cholesterol, HDL, LDL and triglycerides. Your doctor will ask you to consume no food or beverage (other than water) 12 hours prior to the test. It is a good idea to schedule your appointment first thing in the morning.

INFORMATION SOURCES:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 06/05, NIH Public Notice 05-3290; American Heart Association, "How To Get Your Cholesterol Tested," 04/04/08; Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease, 11/08/07

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