



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HIGH CHOLESTEROL

Your cholesterol levels are important



High levels of cholesterol in the blood can increase your risk of getting heart disease.



Heart disease is the number one cause of death for women and men in the United States.

How does cholesterol cause heart disease?

Too much cholesterol in the blood can lead to plaque buildup in your arteries. This blockage restricts blood flow and doesn't allow enough oxygen to get to your heart. This buildup can potentially lead to a heart attack.

Symptoms of high blood cholesterol aren't visible, so it's important to speak with your doctor about getting tested. Lowering cholesterol levels that are too high can help lessen the risk of developing heart disease, and can help reduce the chance of a heart attack or dying from heart disease.

What affects cholesterol levels?

Things you can do something about:



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 (bad) and total cholesterol levels, as well as your triglycerides, and help raise your HDL (good) cholesterol levels.



Physical activity: Not being physically active is a risk factor for heart disease. Regular physical activity can help lower LDL and raise HDL cholesterol levels. It also helps you lose weight. You should try to be physically active for 30 minutes on most, if not all, days.

Things you cannot do anything about:



Age and gender: As women and men get older, their cholesterol levels rise. Before menopause, women have lower total cholesterol levels than men of the same age. After 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.

High cholesterol treatment options

The main goal of cholesterol-lowering treatment is to lower your LDL level enough to reduce your risk of developing heart disease or having a heart attack. Four risk categories (numbered I-IV) will affect the type of treatment that is right for you. Talk with your doctor to determine your risk category and recommended treatment.

There are 2 main ways to help lower your cholesterol. Talk to your doctor before making any changes in your routine or starting any treatments:

- **Therapeutic lifestyle changes (TLC)** — Includes a cholesterol-lowering diet (called the TLC diet), physical activity, and weight management. TLC is for anyone whose LDL is above normal
- **Drug therapy** — If cholesterol-lowering drugs are needed, they are used together with TLC to help lower LDL

To reduce your risk of heart disease or keep it low, it is very important to control any other risk factors you may have, such as high blood pressure and smoking.

Learn More

More information on lowering cholesterol is available from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) website at www.nhlbi.nih.gov (under Health Information for the Public).

Source: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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