

## Cholesterol Matters to Your Heart

(ARA) - Everyone knows they should watch their cholesterol, but do you know why? If you have high cholesterol, you may have twice the risk for heart disease -- the number one health problem for both women and men in the United States.

High levels of cholesterol can lead to heart disease, heart attacks and strokes. Bad cholesterol, known as LDL, floats through your bloodstream, occasionally catching on the inside walls of the blood vessels. If enough cholesterol accumulates in one spot, the buildup -- known as a plaque -- can block the passage of blood. The resulting restriction of blood flow to the heart can cause a heart attack, while restriction of blood to the brain can lead to a stroke.

Luckily, you may be able to reduce your risk of suffering one of these life-threatening events by lowering your bad cholesterol levels. You can check your cholesterol level through a simple blood test. The National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) recommends LDL cholesterol levels below 130 mg/dL for people without heart disease but at moderate risk for developing heart disease. For those people with heart disease or a disease that puts them at high risk (such as diabetes), the recommended LDL cholesterol levels are below 100 mg/dL. Further reductions to 70 mg/dL are optimal and may be beneficial for those at particularly high risk.

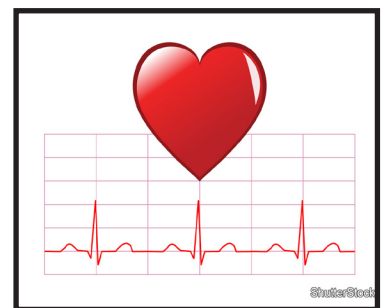
To control your cholesterol levels, you should limit your intake of foods that are high in saturated fats and cholesterol, such as fatty meats and whole milk. Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables and other high-fiber foods, and be sure to exercise as recommended by your doctor.

In some cases, however, lifestyle changes alone are not enough. In those instances, medications including statins might be prescribed to lower cholesterol levels further. Thanks in part to the availability of these medications, the average patient today is considerably more likely to reach their LDL cholesterol goals than they were just 10 years ago.

Because high cholesterol doesn't cause day-to-day symptoms, it can easily go undetected. Many people don't know they have high cholesterol until they develop symptoms of heart disease such as chest pain. As a result, it is important to monitor your cholesterol levels regularly. And if your doctor has prescribed a cholesterol-lowering drug, be sure to stay on your medication.

If you have high cholesterol, or if you do not know your cholesterol levels, here are some important questions to ask your doctor:

- \* Why should I keep track of my cholesterol levels?
- \* Am I at risk for a heart attack or stroke?
- \* What puts me at risk?
- \* What are my current cholesterol levels?
- \* What are my cholesterol goals?
- \* How often should I check my cholesterol?
- \* How can I lower my cholesterol through diet? Exercise? Medication?
- \* What are the possible side effects of cholesterol-lowering medications?
- \* How should I take my medication?



Talk to your doctor to see if you should be doing more to lower your cholesterol levels. Not all cholesterol-lowering medications are the same, so be sure you and your doctor choose the one that's best for you.

Courtesy of ARAcontent