

Is Cholesterol Clogging Your Mind?



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What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is found naturally and exclusively in animals (and animal products such as meat, fish, poultry, egg yolks, and dairy products) and humans; plant foods do not contain cholesterol.

High blood cholesterol is a concern because it increases your risk of heart disease and stroke. It can lead to atherosclerosis, or the narrowing of your arteries, which makes it harder for the blood to circulate through your body. In addition, plaques can form from cholesterol build-up on the walls of the arteries. Plaques can break off and block off the blood flow, causing strokes and heart attacks.

Although high blood cholesterol can increase your risk of developing heart disease, your body needs some cholesterol to make important chemicals in your body such as Vitamin D, hormones and bile.

What is LDL and HDL?

LDL, or low-density lipoprotein, is also known as 'bad' cholesterol because it can narrow the walls of your arteries by increasing the amount of plaques deposited. On the other hand, HDL, or high-density lipoprotein, is also known as 'good' cholesterol because it can decrease the amount of plaque that gets deposited. Therefore, the key to decrease your intake of foods that raises your levels of LDL and increase your intake of foods that raises your levels of HDL.

Risk factors for developing high blood cholesterol.

There are a number of things that can increase your risk of developing high cholesterol. Some people are more genetically inclined to producing more LDL cholesterol, but here are some other factors that may also increase your risk:

- Man > 45 years or woman >55 years
- Family history of heart disease, high blood pressure and/or diabetes
- Black, Aboriginal and South Asian descent
- Smoker
- High blood pressure
- Have diabetes or metabolic syndrome
- Obesity/Waist circumference > 40" for men and >35" for women
- Prior stroke or a heart attack, angioplasty, or heart surgery
- Lack of physical activity
- Hormone replacement therapy (>5 years)
- Total cholesterol: HDL cholesterol ratio >4
- LDL cholesterol level >2.0 mmol/L (in the presence of other risk factors)
- HDL cholesterol <1.0 mmol/L

When should I get my cholesterol levels checked?

The best thing to do is to ask your doctor and he or she will be able to tell you when and how often you should get your cholesterol checked. Normally screening starts at about 40 years for men and 50 years for women if there are no risk factors, but if you do have other risk factors, screening may start at a younger age.

What can affect my cholesterol level?

A common misconception is that what you eat has a big effect on your blood cholesterol levels. However, 75% of the cholesterol is made by your body, and only 25% comes from your diet! However, this is not to say that what you eat isn't important because it is! There are many things you can do to either reduce or control your cholesterol intakes. Here are some examples of the simple changes you make to your diet.

Eat more of	Instead of
Fish, (skinless) poultry, lean meat	Organ meats (like liver), Sausages and other processed meats, meats with the skin
Skim or low-fat milk and other dairy products such as yogurt and cheese	Whole milk, whip cream, half and half, heavy cream, high fat cheese
Sherbet, sorbet, ice milk	Ice cream
Steamed, baked, broiled, roasted vegetables and meat	Buttered or deep-fried foods
Clear soups	Creamy soups (chowders, bisques)
Baked potatoes	French fries, onion rings, hash browns
Unsaturated vegetable oils: corn, canola, safflower, sesame, sunflower, olive, soybean; fish, nuts and seeds	Saturated and trans fats: butter, coconut oil, palm oil, lard, bacon fat, hydrogenated margarine
Graham crackers, animal crackers, fig bars, vanilla wafers, lady fingers	Cheesecake, pastries, doughnuts and other commercially baked goods, chocolate
Whole grains and cereals that are high in fibre	Products made with refined, white flour
Fruit	Refined carbohydrates and sugar
Egg Whites	Egg yolks
Tomato Sauce	Creamy pasta sauces (alfredo)

****The bottom line:** it is ok to consume food that contain cholesterol such as eggs, but you should limit your consumption of foods that contain high amounts of saturated fats (commercially prepared pastries, baked goods, animal fats (especially red meat and high fat dairy products), trans fats, palm and coconut oil, etc.)

What else can I do to control my cholesterol levels?

Here are a few other tips you can easily incorporate into your everyday life:

- Reduce your fat intake to 20-35% of your daily calories, especially trans and saturated fats
- When choosing snacks, look for products that are low in salt and sugar, and high in fiber.
- Decrease or stop smoking because it increases LDL cholesterol
- Increase the amount of physical activity you do – try taking the stairs, walking to the grocery store and decrease the amount of time you spend sitting.

The Prostate Education & Research Centre



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