

Understanding High Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a naturally occurring hormone in your body that is created in your liver. The level of cholesterol in your blood is influenced by your diet. Foods high in saturated fats and cholesterol will increase your blood cholesterol level.

Excess cholesterol can coat your blood vessels and is known as plaque. Over time this build up can narrow the vessels and is known as “hardening of the arteries.” The flow of blood is slowed, and this can cause heart disease. If a piece of the plaque breaks off, and becomes stuck in an artery feeding the brain this is what is known as a stroke. If a blood clot blocks an artery feeding the heart it is a heart attack.

High cholesterol is a major risk factor for heart disease which is the number one cause of death in the United States. Each year, more than a million Americans have heart attacks and about half a million die from heart disease.

How can I lower my cholesterol level?

- Reducing the amount of saturated fat and cholesterol in your diet.
 - Read labels on processed foods and note the amount of saturated fat and cholesterol listed, choose wisely.
 - Limit saturated fats and oils such as lard, bacon drippings, palm oil and coconut oil. Avoid trans fats or partially hydrogenated vegetable oils.
 - Limit fatty meats such as bacon, sausage, steak, ribs, ground meat, hot dogs, corned beef, pastrami, processed meats such as bologna, and organ meats such as livers and kidneys.
 - Limit egg yolks.
 - Limit milk products containing more than 1% milk fat. This includes cream, most cheeses, whipped topping, and non-dairy creamers.
 - Avoid fast foods such as hamburgers, French fries, fried chicken and tacos.
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Heart healthy foods to include in your diet:

- Vegetable oils such as olive or canola oil.
- Skinless chicken or turkey, lean beef, veal, pork, lamb and fish.
- Meatless main dishes such as beans, peas, pasta or rice.

Achieving your ideal weight.

Being overweight can increase your cholesterol. Lowering your weight can help lower your cholesterol level.

Increase your physical activity.

Physical activity will help lower cholesterol levels and reduce your risk of heart disease.

Adapted from information on the National Institutes of Health's website.

For more information visit:
American Heart Association **www.heart.org**
