

# Midlands Family Medicine



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## Education

### Cholesterol: Treating High Levels Teen Version

#### Why should I treat high cholesterol?

If your cholesterol level is high or borderline high, start this treatment program. If your cholesterol level is normal, it is still a good idea for your whole family to follow these recommendations.

High cholesterol is not the only risk factor for coronary heart disease. Other risk factors are just as harmful: physical inactivity, obesity, and smoking. The more risk factors that you have, the higher your risk of heart disease. Living a long and healthy life requires healthy eating and regular exercise. It is easier to start these habits as a teenager than to have to adopt them as an adult. If you follow most of these recommendations, you are protecting your heart and blood vessels.

#### How can I take care of myself?

- **Low-fat diet** The American Heart Association recommends a low-cholesterol, low saturated-fat diet for everyone over age 2 years. Eating foods that contain cholesterol raises our blood cholesterol levels. Foods that come from plants, such as fruits, vegetables, and grains, do not contain cholesterol. Foods that come from animals, such as meats, eggs, and milk products, do contain cholesterol. Eating saturated fats also raises blood cholesterol levels because fat causes our bodies to make more cholesterol. Even if we don't eat any fat, the liver produces a small amount of cholesterol each day. Therefore, we will always have some cholesterol in our blood. Currently, most Americans get 40 percent of their daily calories from fat. However, in a healthy diet no more than 30 percent of the total calories should come from fat. The goal is to eat fat in moderation. You do not have to eliminate fat from your diet entirely. Lower the amount of fat you eat so that fat provides no more than 30 percent of your daily calories. Eating a low-fat diet will help lower your cholesterol level and is rather easy:
  - Eat more fish, turkey, and chicken because these meats have less fat than red meats. Buy lean ground beef or ground turkey for hamburgers. Use lean ham or turkey for sandwiches.
  - Trim the fat from meat and remove the skin from poultry before you eat it.
  - Avoid eating meats with the highest fat content, such as bacon, sausages, salami, pepperoni, and hot dogs.
  - Limit the number of eggs you eat to 3 or 4 eggs a week.
  - Limit all meats to moderately sized portions.
  - Use 1% or skim (0.5%) milk instead of whole milk (which is 3.5% fat).
  - Use a margarine product (vegetable oil spread without trans fats) instead of butter.
  - Avoid any food fried in butter or fat. If you prefer fried meats, use special margarine or nonstick cooking sprays.
  - Increase the amount of fiber you eat. Most grains, vegetables, and fruits are good sources of fiber.
- **Family exercise program** Exercise is the best way to raise the level of HDL (the "good" cholesterol) in your blood. Your goal should be at least 30 minutes of vigorous (aerobic) exercise 3 or more times each week. For exercise to be vigorous it must involve the large muscles of the legs and cause your heart to beat faster. Vigorous exercise also improves your heart's response to work. Try the following forms of exercise:
  - Walk or bike instead of riding in a car.
  - Use stairs instead of elevators.
  - Join a team or learn a new sport (for example, roller skating) that requires vigorous exercise. Swimming and jogging are sports that burn lots of calories. Some sports, such as baseball and football, don't exercise the heart.
  - Exercise to a video tape or music on TV.

- Use an exercise bike, dance, or run in place while you watch TV.
- Limit your TV time to 2 hours or less a day. Sitting activities interfere with physical fitness.
- **Ideal body weight** People who are overweight tend to have a low HDL and a high LDL, which is the opposite of what is good for them. Achieving an ideal body weight will improve your blood cholesterol levels. Fat has twice as many calories as the same amount of protein or carbohydrates. When a person eats less fat each day, he automatically gets less calories from his food each day. A low-fat diet AND exercise are the key ingredients for losing weight.

See also:

- **Smoking** If you are a smoker, a good way to raise your HDL level is to stop smoking.
- **Additional help** If your level of cholesterol remains high even though you follow these treatment recommendations, ask for a consultation with a nutritionist about special diets. Also, join an exercise program at a local gym or fitness center. These additional steps will usually help you. Medications are sometimes prescribed for adults to help lower their cholesterol levels. However, they are rarely prescribed for teenagers unless you have a rare form of high cholesterol related to disease rather than diet.

### **When should my cholesterol be rechecked?**

Generally, if you have high cholesterol (above the 95th percentile), your cholesterol level is checked again about 2 to 4 months after you start a program to lower it. If the cholesterol level is borderline high (above the 75th percentile), it is usually checked yearly.

Your next cholesterol test is on \_\_\_\_\_.

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