

Healthy Habits

September 2005

Tips for reaching and maintaining your optimum state of health

September is National Cholesterol Education Month

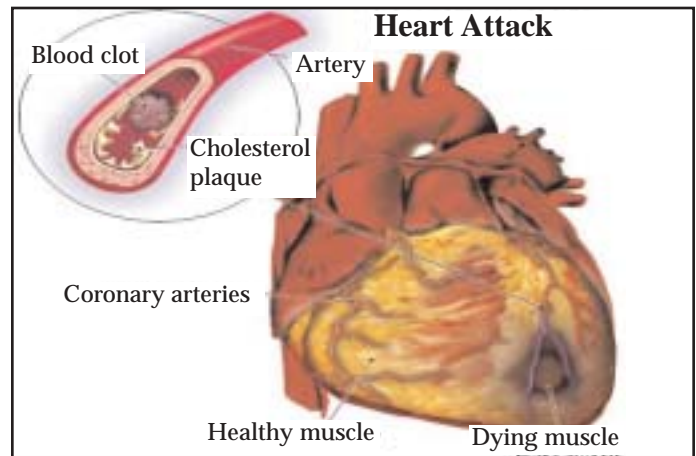
Cholesterol is a soft, fat-like, waxy substance found naturally in the bloodstream and in all your body's cells. It is actually an important part of a healthy body because it's used for producing cell membranes and some hormones, and serves other needed bodily functions. Too much cholesterol in the blood can lead to cardiovascular disease - America's No. 1 killer. People whose total cholesterol is 240 mg/dL have twice the risk of coronary heart disease as people whose cholesterol level is below 200 mg/dL.

So where does cholesterol come from?

Your body makes all the cholesterol it needs. The saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol you eat may raise your blood cholesterol level. Having too much cholesterol in your blood may lead to increased risk for heart disease and stroke. Animal products, such as meats, poultry, fish, eggs, butter, cheese and whole milk contain both cholesterol and saturated fat, and you should limit the amount of these that you eat. Processed foods made with hydrogenated fats contain trans-fatty acids, which can raise blood cholesterol. Foods from plants like fruits, vegetables and whole-grain products, are healthy to eat because they are low in fat, and contain fiber which can lower blood cholesterol.

What's "good" and "bad" cholesterol?

Understand first that cholesterol and other fats cannot dissolve in the blood. They have to be transported to and from the cells by special carriers called lipoproteins. Low-density lipoprotein, or LDL, is known as the "bad" cholesterol. Too much LDL cholesterol can clog your arteries, increasing your risk of heart attack and stroke. High-density lipoprotein, or HDL, is known as the "good" cholesterol. Your body makes HDL cholesterol for your protection. It carries cholesterol away from your arteries. Studies suggest that high levels of HDL cholesterol can reduce your risk of heart attack. The more trans fats and saturated fats you ingest, however, the less balance there is between HDLs and LDLs and the more clogged your arteries become.



Visit the Health Information Library at www.optimahealth.com/members to find the latest health information about cholesterol, as well as stroke and heart attack prevention.

How can I stay healthy?

To reduce cholesterol in your blood, eat foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol, lose weight if you need to and exercise for a total of at least 30 minutes on most or all days of the week. Some people may also need to take medicine, because changing their diet isn't enough. If you've been prescribed medication or advised to make lifestyle changes to help manage your cholesterol, carefully follow your doctor's recommendations. Here are some simple steps you can take to lower your cholesterol:

- ✍ Stop smoking.
- ✍ Enjoy 30-60 minutes of exercise most days of the week
- ✍ Maintain a healthy weight.
- ✍ Eat a wide variety of foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol and limit overall fat intake.
- ✍ Eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables every day.
- ✍ Select whole-grain cereals, breads, and pasta.
- ✍ Eat fish at least twice weekly, choose poultry without skin and leaner cuts of meat instead of fatty ones.
- ✍ Choose fat-free or 1% milk dairy products.

Don't forget, to know where you *need* to be, you have to know where you are! So get tested, get information and get on the road to a healthier you.

The material contained in Healthy Habits is not intended to be medical advice on any particular matter. Readers should seek appropriate professional advice before acting on the basis of any information contained in this publication. This information is provided courtesy of Optima Health.