

Cholesterol

FACTS:

- Everyone has cholesterol in his or her body.
- Cholesterol is a soft, fat-like substance found in the blood and in all the body's cells.
- A high cholesterol level is bad because cholesterol can build up with other substances in the inner walls of arteries. This buildup, called plaque, can narrow the arteries and reduce blood flow.
- Sometimes plaques rupture and cause blood clots that can totally block blood flow in the artery. These clots can break off and travel to another part of the body causing blockage in the heart that can cause a heart attack, or causing a blockage in the artery in the brain that can cause a stroke.
- High blood cholesterol itself does not cause symptoms, so many people are unaware that their cholesterol level is too high.
- It is important to find out what your cholesterol numbers are because lowering cholesterol levels that are too high reduces the risk for developing heart disease and reduces the chance of a heart attack or dying of heart disease.
- If you already have heart disease, lowering your cholesterol will reduce your chance of a heart attack.
- High blood cholesterol is one of the major risk factors for heart disease.
- Heart disease is the number one killer of women and men in the United States. Each year more than a million Americans have heart attacks, and about a half a million people die from heart disease.

Healthy Hearts Month

RESOURCES:

American Heart Association

www.americanheart.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/heartdisease

Go Red for Women

www.goredforwomen.org

Michigan Department of Community Health

www.michigan.gov/cvh

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

www.nhlbi.org



WHAT DO YOUR CHOLESTEROL NUMBERS MEAN?

Everyone age 20 and older should have his or her cholesterol measured at least once every 5 years. It is best to have a blood test called a "lipoprotein profile" to find out your cholesterol numbers. This blood test is done after a nine- to 12-hour fast and gives information about your:

- **Total Cholesterol**
(Less than 200 mg/dL is desirable)
- **LDL (bad) Cholesterol** - the main source of cholesterol buildup and blockage in the arteries
(Less than 100 mg/dL is optimal)
- **HDL (good) Cholesterol** – helps keep cholesterol from building up in the arteries
(Levels of 60 mg/dL or more help lower your risk for heart disease)
- **Triglycerides** – another form of fat in your blood
(Levels that are borderline high [150-199 mg/dL] or high [200 mg/dL or more] may need treatment in some people)

WHAT AFFECTS CHOLESTEROL LEVELS?

A variety of things can affect cholesterol levels. These are things you can control:

- **Diet.** Saturated fat and cholesterol in the food you eat make your blood cholesterol level go up. Saturated fat is the main culprit, but cholesterol in foods also matters. Reducing the amount of saturated fat and cholesterol in your diet helps lower your blood cholesterol level.
- **Weight.** Being overweight is a risk factor for heart disease. It also tends to increase your cholesterol. Losing weight can help lower your LDL and total cholesterol levels, as well as raise your HDL and lower your triglyceride levels.
- **Physical Activity.** Being physically inactive is a risk factor for heart disease. Regular physical activity can help lower LDL (bad) cholesterol and raise HDL (good) cholesterol levels. It also helps you lose weight. You should try to be physically active for 30 minutes on most, if not all, days.

Things you cannot do anything about also can affect cholesterol levels. These include:

- **Age and Gender.** As women get older, their cholesterol levels rise. Before menopause, women have lower total cholesterol levels than men of the same age. After menopause, women's LDL levels tend to rise.
- **Heredity.** Your genes partly determine how much cholesterol your body makes. High blood cholesterol can run in families.