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## Controlling Your Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a waxy substance. It travels in your blood through the blood vessels. When you have high cholesterol, it can build up along the walls of the blood vessels. This makes the vessels narrower and decreases blood flow. You are then at greater risk of having a heart attack or a stroke.

### Good and bad cholesterol

Lipids are fats, and blood is mostly water. Fat and water don't mix. So our bodies need lipoproteins (lipids inside a protein shell) to carry the lipids. The protein shell carries its lipids through the bloodstream. There are two main kinds of lipoproteins:

- LDL (low-density lipoprotein) is known as "bad cholesterol." It mainly carries cholesterol. It delivers this cholesterol to body cells. Excess LDL cholesterol will build up in artery walls. This increases your risk for heart disease and stroke.
- HDL (high-density lipoprotein) is known as "good cholesterol." This protein shell collects excess cholesterol that LDLs have left behind on blood vessel walls. That's why high levels of HDL cholesterol can decrease your risk of heart disease and stroke.

### Controlling cholesterol levels

Total cholesterol includes LDL and HDL cholesterol, as well as other fats in the bloodstream. If your total cholesterol is high, follow the steps below to help lower your total cholesterol level:

#### Eat less unhealthy fat

- Cut back on saturated fats and trans fats (also called hydrogenated) by selecting lean cuts of meat, low-fat dairy, and using oils instead of solid fats. Limit baked goods, processed meats, and fried foods. A diet that's high in these fats increases your bad cholesterol. It's not enough to just cut back on foods containing cholesterol.
- Eat about two, 3.5 ounce servings of non-fried fish such as salmon, herring, sardines or mackerel per week. Most fish contain omega-3 fatty acids. These help lower total blood cholesterol. Omega-3 fatty acids lowers triglyceride levels, another form of fat in the blood. If you are pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant or are breastfeeding, talk with your healthcare provider for advice about the best fish choices and how much to eat.
- Eat more whole grains and soluble fiber (such as oat bran). These lower overall cholesterol.

#### Be active

- Choose an activity you enjoy. Walking, swimming, and riding a bike are some good ways to be active.
- Start at a level where you feel comfortable. Increase your time and pace a little each week.
- Work up to 30 to 40 minutes of moderate to high intensity physical activity at least 3 to 4 days per week.
- Remember, some activity is better than none.

- If you haven't been exercising regularly, start slowly. Check with your healthcare provider to make sure the exercise plan is right for you.

### **Quit smoking**

Quitting smoking can improve your lipid levels. It also lowers your risk for heart disease and stroke.

### **Manage your weight**

If you are overweight or obese, your healthcare provider will work with you to lose weight and lower your BMI (body mass index) to a normal or near-normal level. Making diet changes and increasing physical activity can help.

### **Take medicine as directed**

Many people need medicine to get their LDL levels to a safe level. Medicine to lower cholesterol levels is effective and safe. Taking medicine is not a substitute for exercise or watching your diet! Your healthcare provider can tell you whether you might benefit from a cholesterol-lowering medicine.

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