

September is National Cholesterol Education Month!

By

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September is National Cholesterol Education Month. Have you had your cholesterol checked lately? If not, it might be a good idea to do so to know if some lifestyle changes are in order. When it comes to cholesterol, it's good to know your numbers. High blood cholesterol increases your risk for heart disease and heart attack, and lowering it decreases that risk. It's that simple. So, September is a great time to learn about high blood cholesterol, especially if you are among the sixty-five (65) million Americans who have this condition. Did you know that with a combination of a heart healthy diet, physical activity, and weight management, you may be able to lower your high blood cholesterol by 20 to 30 percent?

What is cholesterol? Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance found in your body. **Why is high blood cholesterol bad for your heart?** Your body makes all the cholesterol you need to be healthy. When you eat foods high in saturated fat, *trans* fat, and cholesterol, your body can make too much cholesterol. Over time, this extra cholesterol can clog your arteries. This increases your chances of having a heart attack or stroke.

What is good and bad cholesterol? **HDL** is "good cholesterol". It helps clean fat and cholesterol from your blood vessels. Just remember the **H** in **HDL** for **Healthy**, and the **Higher** it is, the better. It protects against heart disease. **LDL** is "bad cholesterol". It carries cholesterol to your blood vessels, clogging them like rust in a pipe. Remember the **L** in **LDL** for **Lousy**, and the **Lower** it is, the better.

What are triglycerides? They are another form of fat in your blood and can raise heart disease risk, also. Levels that are borderline high (150-199 mg/dL) or high (200 mg/dL or more) may need treatment in some people.

What is the test to measure cholesterol levels? The blood test to measure the cholesterol levels is called a lipid profile. You can have this test done at your doctor's office. If you are 20 years of age or older, check your cholesterol at least every five years. Your doctor may test you more often if your cholesterol levels are high.

What do your cholesterol numbers mean? A total cholesterol less than 200 mg/dL is ideal. Strive to keep it at that level. Anything higher may need some lifestyle changes to prevent medical intervention. LDL (or Bad) cholesterol less than 100 mg/dL is

ideal. Keep it low! HDL (or Good) cholesterol 40 mg/dL or higher is ideal. The higher, the better!

How can I lower high blood cholesterol? With a combination of a heart healthy diet, physical activity, and weight management, you may be able to lower your high blood cholesterol by 20 to 30 percent. To have a heart healthy diet, cut back on foods high in saturated fat, *trans* fat, and cholesterol. Start eating heart healthy foods by making a few changes at a time. **Eat more** of these foods:

- Fat-free milk, cheese, and yogurt
- Fruits, vegetables, and whole grains
- Fish
- Turkey and chicken without skin
- Lean cuts of meat
- Beans and lentils
- Corn (instead of flour) tortillas

Plan to start incorporating 30 to 60 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days. If you are only able to incorporate it two or three days a week, that is better than not at all. Some weeks you may be able to do more, so it will average to about three times a week. Make this your goal.

The third lifestyle change you can make to lower cholesterol is to aim for a healthy weight. Many times, if you start cutting back on foods high in saturated fat, *trans* fat, and cholesterol, you will lose those unwanted pounds and that excess body fat. You will feel so much better about yourself, as well as, actually feel better physically.

To summarize, here is a checklist to get you started on the road to good health:

- Get my cholesterol level checked.
- Talk to my doctor about what my cholesterol numbers mean.
- Read food labels to choose foods lower in saturated fats, *trans* fats, cholesterol, and calories.
- Bake, broil, or grill foods instead of frying.
- Eat more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Drink water or sugar-free beverages instead of regular soda.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Lose weight if I am overweight.
- Do 30 to 60 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days.

Take action now to prevent disease— reduce the fat, stop smoking, or go for a walk. Play it smart and change your lifestyle now! Start living healthy and guard your heart! For more information contact the Hardee County Extension Office at 863-773-2164. (Source: http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/cho/cho1_tlc.pdf)