

Cholesterol Consciousness

What Cholesterol Does To Your Heart

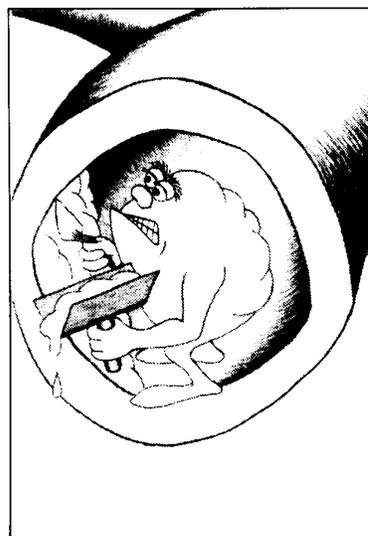
The whole issue of cholesterol can be very confusing. You may have heard that some cholesterol is good for you while other cholesterol can be harmful, but you may not know which is which. You may have been told that too much dietary cholesterol increases your risk for heart disease, but you may not know how. You can improve your cholesterol consciousness by learning about what cholesterol is, where it is found, and what it actually does to your heart.

What is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a **lipoprotein** - a fatty substance in the blood that is coated with protein. The body itself manufactures about 1,000 milligrams of cholesterol daily, to form hormones, cell membranes, and other body substances. Dietary cholesterol is not essential for health, and can actually be harmful. There are several different types of cholesterol, but the two most important are **LDL (low-density lipoprotein)** and **HDL (high-density lipoprotein)**. LDL has a thin protein layer and tends to deposit itself on the walls of the blood vessels, while HDL has a thick protein layer and actually removes cholesterol from the bloodstream.

Cholesterol and Atherosclerosis

Excess cholesterol and other fats can build up on the inner walls of blood vessels - a condition known as atherosclerosis.



LDL "bad" cholesterol deposits itself on arterial walls.



HDL "good" removes cholesterol from the bloodstream.

These fatty build-ups can restrict, and in some cases totally block, the flow of oxygen-rich blood through the blood vessels. When atherosclerosis occurs in the blood

vessels that nourish the heart (**coronary artery disease**), chest pain and heart attack can result.

Cholesterol Measurement

The only way to determine whether you have too much cholesterol in your bloodstream is to have a laboratory blood test performed. This test will measure how many milligrams of cholesterol are present in a deciliter of blood. Depending on age, total cholesterol over 200 mg./dl. is considered to be undesirably high. If your total cholesterol level is elevated, your physician may ask that further testing be done to find out the percentage of LDL to HDL. (Remember, LDL deposits itself on arterial walls, HDL removes cholesterol from the blood-stream.) Knowing all the numbers and your ratio can give you a better understanding of your overall risk.

Cholesterol Control

In most cases, a cholesterol/fat reduced diet and regular physical exercise can help lower cholesterol in the blood. Some people, however, require cholesterol-lowering drugs to keep their cholesterol within safe levels. The best advice for all of us is to reduce our intake of dietary cholesterol and fats, to exercise vigorously 3-5 times a week, and to have our cholesterol levels checked regularly.

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