

“Rambling on with Kathleen”

Cholesterol

What is up (or down) with cholesterol? You may have heard your health care provider talk about good and bad cholesterol but what does this mean and why should someone be concerned about cholesterol anyway?

First of all, cholesterol is found in the bloodstream and in your cells. It is a fatty, waxy type substance that is made by your liver and other cells but also comes from foods you eat. We all need some cholesterol for our cells to function and for some hormone production, but because it does not dissolve in the blood, if we get too much in the bloodstream, problems can arise. Cholesterol levels are tested and may be an indicator for heart disease or stroke.

Because cholesterol cannot move in the blood without assistance, it is carried by lipoproteins such as LDL (Low Density Lipoprotein) and HDL (High Density Lipoprotein). If too much of the “bad cholesterol, Low Density Lipoprotein or LDL is circulating it can clog or “harden” the arteries because the buildup will make the arteries rigid and more narrow - blocking blood flow to major organs such as the heart and brain. This is why people with high cholesterol (LDL) may be at higher risk for strokes and heart attacks.

HDL (High Density Lipoprotein) is referred to as the “good cholesterol”. It is thought that the HDL carries cholesterol away from the arteries and back to the liver where it is removed from the body. Some health care professionals believe that high levels of HDL may also actually remove the extra cholesterol from the arterial plaque on the walls which would then slow down the buildup.

Triglycerides also play a role in computing total cholesterol. Triglyceride is a fat that is made in your body. It also is a good source for energy so like cholesterol, we do need triglycerides in our bodies within a balance, but too much can also cause problems. The body makes triglycerides but we also get it from foods we eat. Many factors are related to high triglyceride levels such as obesity, decreased physical activity, smoking, drinking alcohol and eating lots of those great carbohydrates that taste so good.

Lp(a) cholesterol is also included in the total cholesterol count but much is not known about this yet. Some think it may somehow assist with the buildup of fatty deposits on the artery walls.

Although we have some control over our cholesterol levels with what we eat and how we exercise, our bodies and genetic makeup also determine our cholesterol levels.

There are actions you can implement to manage your cholesterol and prevent hypercholesterolemia (high levels of blood cholesterol).

- Eat a well balanced diet low in saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol
- Learn to read the labels on food you purchase

- Increase intake of fruits and vegetables and fat free dairy
- Choose lean cuts of meat and trim the fat off
- Limit use of fats and oils
- Decrease salt intake
- Limit alcohol use
- Increase daily exercise or physical activity (as per your physician)

Some people have reported a lowering of the cholesterol just by increasing physical activity and taking omega 3's (fish oils) or biomedical approaches. Others may require a prescription by the health care provider in addition to all of the above.

How do you know if you have high cholesterol? It is a good idea to discuss this with your doctor or health care provider. Cholesterol levels can be determined through a very simple blood test.

Total Blood Cholesterol: (all cholesterol so the lower the better)

Less than 200 mg/dl is considered the normal or good range
 200-239 mg/dl is borderline high range
 240 and above is considered the high range

HDL: (good cholesterol so the higher the better)

Ranges can be different for men and women. We want this number to be higher as it is the good cholesterol so the higher the number the lower the risk.

- Less than 40 for men is low
- Less than 50 for women is low
- 40-59 is better
- 60 and above is very good

LDL: (bad cholesterol so the lower the better)

Less than 70-100mg/dl is a goal if you are at high risk or have certain medical conditions.

- 100-129 mg/dl = Near or above normal or optimal
- 130 to 159mg/dl= Borderline High
- 160 to 189 mg/dl= High
- 190 mg/dl or higher = Very High

Triglycerides:

- Less than 150 mg/dl = Normal
- 200 to 499 mg/dl = Borderline High
- 500 and above = Very high

Please know that your basic health and choices for your healthcare are not determined solely by numbers from a blood test. Although physicians use these tests to assist you with your treatment care plan, it is important to realize that many more factors are considered and everyone is different. It is recommended that you discuss the issues and your treatment plan with your doctor or health care provider. Some people that may have concerns about cholesterol may even keep their own chart or record from each visit and blood test. Others may also plan out menus in advance to be sure their diet is healthy to assist them in lowering total cholesterol. Although some people may be able to control or monitor cholesterol through diet and exercise, others may require additional medication from the physician.

For more information on this topic speak to your health care provider or visit Kathleen at the Outlook. Much information can be found on the internet about this topic from sources such as the American Heart Association. As with any health care decisions or concerns, it is important to discuss these issues and form a plan with your health care provider.

Wellness Webpage by Kathleen Dunkelberger Nursing Consulting Services, LLC

This information is for informational and educational purposes only and is not intended to be medical advice. As with any program, all individuals are encouraged to seek the advice of their medical practitioner prior to starting or changing any typical practices and for further information.

Resources: American Heart Association Website, American Stroke Association Website, Professional and personal experience, Other websites and articles reviewed