What You Should Know About Your Cholesterol
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What is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is an essential substance that our bodies need in order to metabolize food and make hormones. However, when too much cholesterol is in our bloodstream, it can lead to serious health complications. A person’s genes, lack of regular exercise, and a diet that in high in fat or fried foods can all contribute to the development of high cholesterol levels.

Since people cannot tell they have high cholesterol, healthcare providers rely on two different measurements to determine cholesterol levels:

• Low-density lipoprotein (LDL): Your “bad cholesterol” can cause a build up of plaque in your blood vessels.
• High-density lipoprotein (HDL): Your “good cholesterol” helps remove bad cholesterol from your body.

What are the Potential Health Complications?

• Atherosclerosis (plaque in blood vessels)
• Heart Attack
• Angina (chest pain)
• Peripheral artery disease
• Stroke
Treatment Options for High Cholesterol

Lifestyle Modifications

All people with high cholesterol (whether taking cholesterol-lowering medication or not) should strive to:

- Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.
- Maintain a healthy diet, which includes decreasing intake of total fat, saturated fats, and cholesterol.
- Increase fiber intake to help decrease LDL cholesterol. Fiber can be obtained from oats, whole wheat, beans, fruits, and vegetables.
- Increase intake of oily fish (salmon, tuna, sardines, or trout) to one or more times per week.
- Engage in regular exercise for at least 20 minutes three or more times a week.
- Avoid the use of tobacco products.

Statins: The Mainstay of Therapy

Statins work by blocking the body’s production of cholesterol, which helps to lower LDL (bad) cholesterol. Additionally, statins can also help modestly increase HDL (good) cholesterol.

Statins have consistently been proven to be the most effective medications for lowering cholesterol. More importantly, they have been proven to decrease the risk of death resulting from health complications due to high cholesterol.

Recently, a study was published that showed that five years of treatment with a statin provides a persistent reduction in the risk of heart problems and death due to heart disease – even 20 years after stopping treatment. These results suggest that statins may provide a lifetime of health benefits.

Additionally, this study showed that statins are safe, with no obvious long-term health risks associated

Statins

- Simvastatin (Zocor®)
- Pravastatin (Pravachol®)
- Fluvastatin (Lescol®)
- Atorvastatin (Lipitor®)
- Lovastatin (Mevacor®)
- Pitavastatin (Livalo®)
- Rosuvastatin (Crestor®)
Another Potential Benefit of Statins: Reduction in the Risk of Dementia

Dementia is a disorder than causes a decline in brain function and short-term memory as people age. Dementia is one of the major causes of disability in older individuals.

It has been suggested that there is a link between increased cholesterol levels and the incidence of dementia. Using a statin to lower cholesterol levels in people who have high cholesterol may reduce the risk of dementia and delay the onset of memory problems. Several studies have been conducted that show that the use of statins may help prevent the development of dementia.

This is an ongoing area of research and more clinical trials need be conducted to provide more definitive information regarding the protective effects of statins against dementia.

with their use. Most patients tolerate statin therapy very well. Minor muscle problems (such as weakness or soreness) occur in as little as 5% of patients. Severe muscle problems are very rare and can be exacerbated by other medications or medical conditions. Therefore, it is always important to let your healthcare providers know what existing medical conditions you have and what medications you are taking, especially if you begin any new medications.
Heart Disease Death Rates, 2008-2010


References