

Cholesterol is a crystalline fatty alcohol found especially in animal fats, blood and nerve tissue and bile.

What to look for

A high level of cholesterol in the blood does not have obvious symptoms but it can be a risk for other circulatory conditions that do have recognisable symptoms.

- Obesity and diabetes.
- impotence

Cholesterol is a paradox: Everyone needs it, but you can have too much which can prove to be fatal. A naturally occurring fat, cholesterol performs functions which are vital to the body such as cell building, insulating nerves, and producing hormones. The liver makes all the cholesterol the body normally needs, but because this substance is found in all animal products, you get a new stock of it whenever you eat meat and dairy foods. For people genetically predisposed to cholesterol problems, a diet high in saturated fats is the chief cause of high cholesterol levels.

There are two basic types of cholesterol - HDL and LDL - high and low density lipoproteins respectively. Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) is a larger, less dense particle that tends to remain in the body. Excessive amounts of LDL cholesterol can overload the circulatory system and it can leave deposits in blood vessels that eventually block them and lead to heart disease.

Causes

Hereditary does play a part in having or not having cholesterol. If you have a predisposition to cholesterol and eat a heavy saturated fat diet, you are more likely to have cholesterol and the related diseases.

A laboratory test to determine your blood cholesterol level is now a routine part of most physical checkups.

Traditional Treatment

Your doctor, Pharmacist as well as many Health Professionals will all say the same thing with regards to diet - Adopt a diet low in fat and cholesterol, lose weight, exercise regularly, and if you smoke, quit.

There are cholesterol reducing drugs available however they are expensive and can produce serious side effects.

Dietary Considerations

Avoid saturated fats and dietary cholesterol. Experts recommend a diet with between 30 and 20 percent of your daily calories from fat. Animal fat should be avoided. Eat more vegetables, fruits, and grains, which are cholesterol free, virtually fat free, and rich in fiber.

Garlic and onion are believed to lower cholesterol.

Prevention

- Watch your weight.
- Eat wisely
- Exercise regularly
- Don't smoke.
- Get your cholesterol checked regularly and monitor your progress

Make Healthy Food Your Ally

Replace saturated fats that are solid at room temperature, with olive or grape seed oil. Eating moderate amounts of such foods as nuts, seeds, and avocados may actually lower LDL cholesterol. Eating grapes may help reduce blood cholesterol.

Do not eat too many eggs per week as one egg yolk contains almost an entire daily recommended allowance of cholesterol. Vitamins, minerals, and nutrients that have reputed cholesterol-reducing properties include vitamins E, C, and A (beta carotene), zinc. Add rice, bran, artichokes, shiitake mushrooms, and chili peppers to your salads and foods as these all may help lower cholesterol.

When to seek further professional advice

- You develop any of the symptoms listed above.