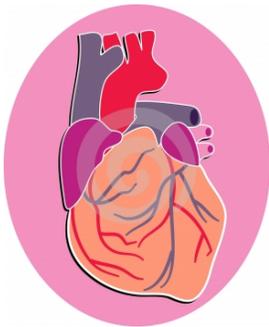


Cholesterol

Having high blood cholesterol can lead to serious health problems such as heart disease and stroke. We should all have our blood cholesterol tested regularly, especially if we have a family history of high cholesterol.

What Is Cholesterol?



Cholesterol is a kind of fat, but not like the fat around your waist. It is actually made by your body, and is important for making hormones and maintaining the structure of every cell in your body.

Your body can make all of the cholesterol it needs. So, if you eat foods that contain lots of cholesterol you can develop **high cholesterol** in your blood.

Dangers of High Cholesterol

When there is too much cholesterol in your blood, it builds up in the walls of your arteries, and that can slow down or block the flow of blood. When this happens you have a greater chance of developing high blood pressure and heart disease or of having heart attacks or strokes. Since there are no symptoms of high blood cholesterol, your doctor should test your cholesterol level on a regular basis.

What Treatments Are Available?



Lifestyle Changes

Changing your eating habits and level of exercise can help lower your cholesterol. Losing as little as five pounds, limiting fatty foods (especially saturated fats), and walking or doing some other activity for 30 minutes, at least 3 times a week, will each help. Doing all three of these will help more.

Drug Treatment

There are some drug treatments to help you lower cholesterol. Your doctor will recommend what is best for you.

What Treatments Are Available? continued

What If I Am 75 or Older?



Drug Treatment, continued

Even if you begin a drug treatment, it is still important to continue making lifestyle changes. These changes help keep the dose of medicine as low as possible and improve your health in other ways as well.

Diminishing Benefits

We have little complete scientific proof that drugs work in older people because only a small number of research studies have included older adults, especially those over 85.

For this reason, doctors don't agree about the benefit of treatments if you are over 75. What they do agree on is that:

- Lowering cholesterol continues to prevent heart attacks and strokes, regardless of the age.
- Your chances of having a heart attack from other causes (not corrected by lowering cholesterol) increases after you are 75. Treatment still prevents heart attacks, but the number not prevented goes up as you get older.

For example, a thousand 55-year-old men with high cholesterol could expect 15 heart attacks in a year, and medicine to lower cholesterol might prevent five. The risk, therefore, is reduced by a third.

However, a thousand 75-year-old people could expect 30 heart attacks in a year. Cholesterol medicine might prevent five (same as in the 55 year old group), but 25 still occur, and only 1 heart attack in 6 is prevented.

How Do I Make a Decision?



Making Your Decision

Your risks from high cholesterol and your personal views on drug treatment play a big role in your decision to use drugs if you are over 75. Practical concerns about the number of medicines you take and costs may make the difference in the best choice for you.

Read as much information as you can about cholesterol and its treatments. Then think about how you feel about taking another medicine with its risks and costs before you talk to your doctor about your cholesterol.

Resources

Organizations

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)

Building 31, Room 5A52
31 Center Drive MSC 2486
Bethesda, MD 20892
Phone: (301) 592-8573
TTY: (240) 629-3255
Fax: (240) 629-3246

Web site: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/chd

Information on lowering your cholesterol, weight, and blood pressure.

The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports (PCPFS)

Department W, Room 738-H
200 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20201-0004
Phone: (202) 690-9000
Fax: (202) 690-5211
Web site: www.fitness.gov

Web Sites

www.cdc.gov/tobacco

Provides tips on quitting smoking and other health problems associated with smoking.

www.healthfinder.gov

“Healthfinder” — a free gateway to reliable consumer health and human services information.

www.medlineplus.gov

Up-to-date, quality health care information. Go to Health Topics, “Cholesterol.”

www.nutrition.gov

Provides reliable information on nutrition, healthy eating, physical activity, and food safety.