

WHAT IS YOUR CHOLESTEROL?

Cholesterol is a type of fat produced by the liver. Essential to proper functioning of your body, it aids in hormone production, supports nerve and brain development, helps the liver digest fats, and is the key substance in every cell of the body.

Cholesterol is important to your health, but you can have too much of a good thing! Cholesterol travels to your cells through your bloodstream. Because it is a fat, it does not mix well with water or blood, and must be wrapped in protein. This is called lipoprotein cholesterol, which is categorized into two forms:

LDL, low density lipoprotein, called bad cholesterol; and HDL, high density lipoprotein, called good cholesterol.

CHOLESTEROL LEVELS

Cholesterol level can be measured three ways: total cholesterol, LDL levels and HDL levels. Optimum levels for each should be:

Total cholesterol level = 200 or less

LDL level = 130 or less

HDL level = 60 or more reduces the risk of heart disease.

High cholesterol, or LDL cholesterol, increases the risk of plaque build-up in the artery walls, causing them to narrow, which contributes directly to heart disease, stroke and other circulatory problems.

CHOLESTEROL SCREENINGS

Getting your cholesterol checked regularly is important to warding off heart disease. Start having your cholesterol checked every five years, beginning at age 20. If you find you have an elevated cholesterol level, you may have to have it checked more often. Children over the age of two should also be checked regularly if there is a family history of high cholesterol or heart disease earlier than age 55.

SELF-CARE TIPS

The primary sources of cholesterol in our diets are eggs, dairy products and red meat. You can keep your cholesterol in check by balancing the amount of these foods that you eat, along with the following healthy eating habits:

1. Consume more fish, poultry, lean beef, pork and lamb instead of sausage or other organ meat
2. Drink skim or low-fat milk.
3. Eat sherbet, sorbet or ice milk in place of ice cream.
4. Eat only egg whites, not yolks.
5. Eat steamed vegetables instead of buttered or fried.
6. Choose baked potatoes over French fries.
7. Use unsaturated vegetable oils.
8. Choose pretzels or air-popped popcorn instead of potato chips as your snack.
9. Stay away from pastries and doughnuts.
10. Eat pancakes or cereal with low-fat milk for breakfast, rather than eggs and bacon.
11. Eat more fruits!

Information provided by: FCG Benefits, www.fcgbenefits.com.