

# C OF WELLNESS KNOW YOUR CHOLESTEROL



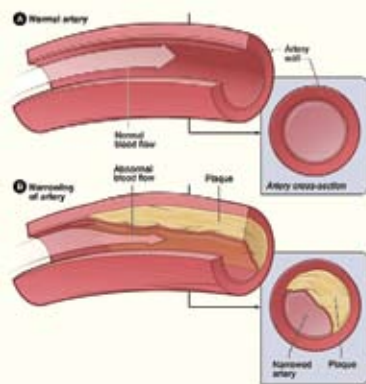
## WHAT IS CHOLESTEROL?

To understand high blood cholesterol (ko-LES-ter-ol), it is important to know more about cholesterol. Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that is found in all cells of the body. Your body needs some cholesterol to work the right way, and it makes all the cholesterol it needs.

- ★ Cholesterol is also found in some of the foods you eat.
- ★ Your body uses cholesterol to help you digest foods.
- ★ Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol is sometimes called bad cholesterol.
- ★ High LDL cholesterol leads to a buildup of cholesterol in arteries. The higher the LDL level in your blood, the greater chance you have of getting heart disease.
- ★ High-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol is sometimes called good cholesterol.
- ★ HDL carries cholesterol from other parts of your body back to your liver. The liver removes the cholesterol from your body. The higher your HDL cholesterol level, the lower your chance of getting heart disease.

**FIGURE 1**

A normal artery with normal blood flow (A) and an artery containing plaque buildup (B).



## WHAT IS HIGH BLOOD CHOLESTEROL?

Too much cholesterol in the blood can be a serious problem because it can lead to heart disease. Cholesterol can build up in the walls of your arteries (blood vessels that carry blood from the heart to other parts of the body; see Figure 1). This buildup of cholesterol is called plaque (plak). Over time, plaque can cause narrowing of the arteries. This is called atherosclerosis (ath-er-o-skler-O-sis), or hardening of the arteries.

Special arteries, called coronary arteries, bring blood to the heart. Narrowing of your coronary arteries caused by plaque can stop or slow down the flow of blood to your heart. When the arteries narrow, the amount of oxygen-rich blood is decreased and your risk for having a heart attack increases. Plaque and resulting health problems can also occur in arteries elsewhere in the body.

Lowering your cholesterol level decreases your chance for having a heart attack. Lowering cholesterol may also slow down, reduce, or even stop plaque from building up.

## WHAT CAUSES HIGH BLOOD CHOLESTEROL?

Several things can increase or decrease the level of cholesterol in your blood. Some of these things you can control, and others you cannot.

You CAN control:

### ★ WHAT YOU EAT

Certain foods have types of fat that raise your cholesterol level:

- Saturated fat raises your bad cholesterol level more than anything else in your diet.
- *Trans* fatty acids (*trans* fats) are made when vegetable oil is hydrogenated to harden it, and they raise cholesterol levels.

- *Cholesterol is found in foods that come from animal sources, for example, egg yolks, meat, and cheese.*

★ YOUR WEIGHT

Being overweight tends to increase the bad cholesterol.

★ YOUR ACTIVITY

Lack of regular exercise can lead to weight gain, which could raise your bad cholesterol level. Regular exercise can help you lose weight and increase the levels of good cholesterol while decreasing the levels of bad cholesterol.

You CANNOT control:

★ HEREDITY

High blood cholesterol can run in families.

★ AGE

The older you are, the more at risk you are for high levels of bad cholesterol.

### HOW DO YOU KNOW WHETHER YOU HAVE HIGH CHOLESTEROL?

There are usually no signs or symptoms of high blood cholesterol. Many people don't know that their cholesterol level is too high.

Everyone age 20 years and older should have their cholesterol levels checked at least once every 5 years. You and your doctor can discuss how often you should be tested.

### HOW IS HIGH BLOOD CHOLESTEROL DIAGNOSED?

High blood cholesterol is diagnosed by checking levels of cholesterol in your blood. It is best to have a blood test called a lipoprotein profile to measure your cholesterol levels. You will need to not eat or drink anything (i.e., fast) for 9 to 12 hours before taking the test.

### HOW IS HIGH BLOOD CHOLESTEROL TREATED?

The main goal of cholesterol-lowering treatment is to lower the bad cholesterol level enough to reduce your risk for having a heart attack or diseases caused by hardening of the arteries. In general, the higher the level of bad cholesterol and the more risk factors you have, like eating fatty foods, the greater your chances of developing heart

disease or having a heart attack. (A *risk factor* is a condition that increases your chance of getting a disease.)

There are two main ways to lower your cholesterol in order to lower your risk:

★ THERAPEUTIC LIFESTYLE CHANGES (TLC)

Includes a cholesterol-lowering diet (called the TLC diet), physical activity, and weight management. TLC is for anyone whose bad cholesterol level is high.

★ DRUG TREATMENT

If cholesterol-lowering drugs are needed, they are used together with TLC treatment to help lower your bad cholesterol level.

### LOWERING CHOLESTEROL WITH LIFESTYLE CHANGES

Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLC) is a set of lifestyle changes you can make to help lower your LDL cholesterol. TLC has three main parts:

1. TLC DIET

- *Limiting the amount of fatty foods and cholesterol you eat.*
- *Eating only enough calories to have a healthy weight.*
- *Increasing the fiber in your diet (e.g., oatmeal, kidney beans, and apples are good sources of fiber).*
- *Adding cholesterol-lowering foods to your diet, such as margarines, bran, oatmeal, walnuts, almonds, fish, and olive oil.*

2. WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

- *Lose weight if you are overweight.*
- *Weight management is especially important for those with a large waist measurement (40 inches or more for men and 35 inches or more for women).*

3. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- *Regular exercise is recommended for everyone. It can help raise good cholesterol levels and lower bad cholesterol levels, especially for those who are overweight with a large waist measurement. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise, such as brisk walking, on most, and preferably all, days of the week.*