

CHOLESTEROL LEVELS AND DIABETES

Cholesterol is a wax-like substance that is present in your body's cells. It is also present in foods derived from animals, such as meat and dairy products. Your body needs cholesterol to make hormones and to build and maintain nerve cells. Cholesterol becomes a problem when you have too much of it in your body. Because cholesterol cannot dissolve, it can build up on the inner walls of your arteries and cause problems with blood circulation.

There are different kinds of cholesterol in your body. Low-density lipoprotein (LDL, also known as "bad" cholesterol) travels to your cells bringing the cholesterol the cells need. When there is too much LDL, cholesterol builds up on the inner walls of the arteries and decreases the blood flow. High-density lipoprotein (HDL, also known as "good" cholesterol) carries away the excess LDL cholesterol and decreases the chances of build up on the walls of the arteries, thereby helping blood flow. Triglycerides are the form in which most fat exists. When extra calories are consumed, they are converted to triglycerides and transported to fat cells where they are stored. Studies show a relationship between elevated triglycerides and heart disease.

Diabetes tends to lower your "good" HDL cholesterol, and raise "bad" LDL cholesterol. In fact LDL cholesterol is denser when you have Type II diabetes resulting in a greater incidence of plaque formation in the arteries. Your triglyceride levels are also more likely to be elevated when you have diabetes.

To stay healthy, it is best to have a balance of HDL and LDL cholesterol in your body. Recommendations from the National Institutes of Health are to have a total cholesterol that is less than 200, with an LDL cholesterol of less than 100 (lower in some cases and if you have additional risk factors) and an HDL cholesterol of 40 or higher. The American Diabetes Association notes that the goal for women is to have an HDL cholesterol of 50 or higher. A triglyceride level of less than 150 is recommended.

There are ways that you can help keep your LDL ("bad") cholesterol low and increase your HDL ("good") cholesterol.

Diet. You can control what you eat.

- avoid fried foods, eggs, red meat, cheese, high fat dairy products, and fast food
- eat less saturated fat (saturated fat comes from animal sources)
- use more polyunsaturated fats (found in fish and corn, soybean, safflower and cottonseed oils) and monounsaturated fats (found in olive oil, canola oil, and avocados).
- eat more foods that are high in fiber, such as fruits, vegetables, grains and legumes.
- reduce the amount of calories you consume.

Exercise. You can control how often you exercise.

- check with your doctor before beginning any exercise program - you may need to start gradually
- it is recommended that you accumulate 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week
- exercise will benefit you by helping to control your weight and increasing HDL ("good") cholesterol

Don't smoke.

- smoking lowers HDL ("good") levels and increases your risk of heart disease

Have your cholesterol checked yearly or more frequently as directed by your physician.

Take medications as directed by your physician. They improve your cholesterol levels and may reduce inflammation triggered by elevated cholesterol levels.

HEALTHY INITIATIVES

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