

## High Cholesterol



Cholesterol is a type of fat. Your body needs it for many things, such as making new cells. You get cholesterol from the foods you eat. And your body makes it.

Having too much cholesterol does not make you feel sick. But it raises your risk of a heart attack and stroke.

### Understanding your cholesterol levels

Your cholesterol levels can help your doctor find out your risk for having a heart attack or stroke.

LDL (low-density lipoprotein) is the "bad" cholesterol. High LDL can raise your risk for heart disease, heart attack, and stroke. HDL (high-density lipoprotein) is the "good" cholesterol. High HDL is linked with a lower risk for heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.

But it's not just about your cholesterol. Your doctor uses your cholesterol levels plus other things to calculate your risk. These include:

- Your blood pressure.
- Whether or not you have diabetes.
- Your age, sex, and race.
- Whether or not you smoke.

### Treating high cholesterol

The goal of treatment is to reduce your chances of having a heart attack or stroke. The goal is not to lower your cholesterol numbers only.

The two types of treatment are:

- **Lifestyle changes.**
- **Medicines called statins.**

The way you choose to lower your risk will depend on how high your risk for heart attack and stroke is. It will also depend on how you feel about taking medicines. Your doctor can help you know your risk. Your doctor can help you balance the benefits and risks of your treatment options.

#### Lifestyle changes

Lifestyle changes are always important, even if you take medicines to lower your risk.

Your doctor may suggest that you make one or more of the following changes:

- Eat heart-healthy foods.
- Lose weight if you need to, and stay at a healthy weight.
- Be active on most, if not all, days of the week.
- Don't smoke.

#### Medicines

Some people take medicines called statins, in addition to making lifestyle changes. This medicine can lower the risk of a heart attack or stroke.

Statins reduce the body's natural production of cholesterol. So they lower the amount of cholesterol in your blood.

Statins don't cause side effects in most people. When side effects happen, they tend to include minor problems such as muscle aches and tiredness. Serious side effects are rare.

If you can't take a statin, your doctor may recommend another type of cholesterol medicine.

### **Deciding about medicine**

Talk with your doctor about your risk of a heart attack and stroke. Together you can decide if medicine is right for you. Your doctor may recommend that you take statins if the benefits outweigh the risks.

For some people, the chance of having a heart attack or stroke is high. These people may decide to start taking a statin because statins can reduce this risk.

For other people, it's not as clear if they need to take a statin. You and your doctor will need to look at your overall health and any other risks you have for heart attack and stroke.

### **Talk to your doctor**

Take this sheet with you to your next doctor visit. You may want to ask your doctor these questions:

- What is my risk for heart attack and stroke?
- Should I do something to help lower my risk?
- What lifestyle changes can help me stay healthy? How can I make changes that will last?
- Should I think about taking medicine?

**Do you have any questions or concerns after reading this information?** It's a good idea to write them down and take them to your next doctor visit.