

Cholesterol Facts

Nearly 40% of all Americans have high cholesterol. High Cholesterol oftentimes has no symptoms and is often referred to as a "silent killer." There are two types of cholesterol: good cholesterol or HDL (high-density lipoprotein) and bad cholesterol or LDL (low-density lipoprotein). HDL moves from your arteries to your liver and expelled, whereas LDL collects on artery walls with the potential to cause stroke or cardiovascular disease.

Here are a few lifestyle changes that can help keep your cholesterol levels in a healthy range:

- **Eat heart-healthy foods.** Reduce saturated fats. Saturated fats, found primarily in red meat and full-fat dairy products, raise total cholesterol levels. Eliminate trans fats. Trans fats, sometimes listed on food labels as "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil," are often used in margarines and store-bought cookies, crackers and cakes. Eat foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids to help reduce blood pressure. Foods with omega-3 fatty acids include salmon, mackerel, herring, walnuts and flaxseeds. Increase soluble fiber. Soluble fiber can reduce the absorption of cholesterol into your bloodstream. Soluble fiber is found in such foods as oatmeal, kidney beans, Brussels sprouts, apples and pears. Add whey protein. Whey protein may account for many of the health benefits attributed to dairy.
- **Exercise on most days of the week and increase your physical activity.** Exercising at least 30 minutes, five times a week can improve cholesterol by raising high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol, the "good" cholesterol.
- **Quit smoking.** The benefits oftentimes occur quickly. Within 20 minutes of quitting, your blood pressure and heart rate recover from the nicotine-induced spike. Within three months of quitting, your blood circulation and lung functioning begin to improve. Within a year of quitting, your risk of heart disease is cut in half when compared to a smoker.
- **Lose weight.** Carrying even a few extra pounds contributes to high cholesterol. If you drink sugary beverages, consider switching to water and snack on air-popped popcorn or pretzels instead of potato chips and candy. Look for ways to incorporate more activity into your daily routine, such as using the stairs instead of taking the elevator or parking farther from your office.
- **Drink alcohol only in moderation.** If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. For healthy adults, that means up to one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men.

If you've made these lifestyle changes and your cholesterol is still high, talk to your doctor. High cholesterol levels are extremely common, and many people need to take medications to lower their cholesterol to a normal range. Importantly, these medications are just one tool that you can use to lower cholesterol levels. When combined with diet, exercise, and lifestyle changes, these medications can be a powerful tool to help you live a healthy life.

Questions? Contact us at 363ISRW.ART.363ISRW@us.af.mil or at 757-764-9316