

Cholesterol

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a natural fat product found and made in our bodies. It plays an important role in keeping us healthy however if we have too much cholesterol inside us it becomes dangerous to our health.

Where does it come from and what does it do?

Most cholesterol is made in our liver and by other cells. It also comes from the food we eat. It is transported around the body in our blood. Cholesterol is important as it makes hormones, vitamin D and bile acids which help our body to digest fat and absorb nutrients.

Why is too much cholesterol a problem?

Cholesterol becomes a problem when our body has more than it needs. It can cause the build-up of fatty deposits in the blood vessels. This build up reduces the flow of blood to our heart and brain. Eventually the blood vessels become totally blocked which can cause a heart attack or stroke. A simple blood test can determine if you have high cholesterol.

What are the different types of cholesterol?

We have two types of cholesterol inside us HDL (the good cholesterol which protects us) and LDL (the bad cholesterol which causes an unhealthy heart). Triglycerides are another type of fat found in the blood stream. They are used as energy by our cells. Any leftover energy is stored as body fat to be used at a later date.

Who can be affected by cholesterol?

Everyone can be affected by high cholesterol if they eat too much saturated fat. High cholesterol is not limited to the elderly. Young children can also be affected. Eating a lot of saturated fats in your diet and being overweight will increase your LDL levels. Some families also have a genetic risk of high cholesterol.

Tips for managing high cholesterol

1. Maintain a healthy lifestyle by limiting foods high in saturated fats e.g. fatty and processed meats like sausages and salami.
2. Avoid full cream dairy foods by switching to low or reduced fat products e.g. replace butter with polyunsaturated margarines.



3. Increase the amount of fresh fruit and vegies along with wholegrain foods daily. Aim for at least two meals of fresh or canned fish a week. Fish contain healthy omega 3 fatty acids. Avoid the fried and battered options.
4. Cease all sugary drinks and fruit juices. Choose plain water as your main drink.
5. Exercise from moderate to vigorous intensity where you are puffed for 60 minutes every day.
6. Lose excess body fat.
7. Choose cholesterol-lowering foods such as oats.

Occasionally some people may need medication to control their high cholesterol when exercise and diet are not enough. However, it is still important to exercise regularly to maintain a healthy heart when you are taking medication.

It is important to have a yearly blood test to monitor the cholesterol level in your blood. This can be done by your doctor.

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

Child and Adolescent Health Service
15 Hospital Avenue, Nedlands, WA, 6009
Telephone: (08) 6456 2222
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