



High Cholesterol

Why is cholesterol important?

High cholesterol is a condition that increases your risk of developing heart disease. Every day, 2,500 Americans die from heart disease. In 2003, 1,408,000 deaths in the United States were related to heart disease. That's almost one out of three deaths!

How does high cholesterol cause heart disease?

Cholesterol is in the blood. When there is too much cholesterol floating around in the blood, it sticks to the arteries and builds up over time. Eventually, the arteries become hard and narrow. The blood does not simply carry cholesterol; it also carries other things the body needs, such as oxygen. When the arteries become narrow, the blood cannot get as much oxygen to the heart, which causes chest pain or angina. If an artery becomes completely blocked, the blood cannot get oxygen to that part of the heart, and a heart attack occurs.

Are you at risk?

Many factors can put a person at risk of developing heart disease or having a heart attack. If you already have heart disease or diabetes, you are at high risk of having a heart attack or stroke. Other risk factors are listed below.

- Cigarette smoking
- High blood pressure (greater than 140/90 mmHg or on blood pressure medicine)
- Low HDL cholesterol (less than 40 mg/dL)

- Family history of early heart disease (father or brother before age 55 OR mother or sister before age 65)
- Age (men 45 years or older; women 55 years or older)
- Race (African Americans, Mexican Americans and American Indians)
- High cholesterol
- Physical inactivity
- Obesity and overweight people
- Stress
- Alcohol

How do you prevent heart disease?

The best solution to heart disease is prevention. You can do this by eating healthy and exercising. Limit foods high in saturated fats by replacing them with lower-fat foods or increasing foods with unsaturated fat. Severely limit foods that contain trans fatty acids. Increase foods high in fiber and foods that contain stanol/sterol esters.

You should also begin an exercise program after checking with your physician. Exercising for 30 minutes, five to six days each week, can significantly reduce your chances of developing heart disease, and it may help control other disease states you already have. Remember, exercise does not have to be 30 dreadful minutes on the treadmill. Instead, you can do fun things like taking dance lessons, working in the garden or playing basketball with your children or grandchildren.

For more information, ask your pharmacist!

This information provided by the Michigan Pharmacists Association and:

