



# Facts about Cholesterol

**Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) is the biggest cause of death in men and women in this country. High blood cholesterol is a major risk factor of CHD, and the following facts will help you understand how to control your blood cholesterol levels and reduce your risk of CHD.**

## What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is found in our blood, and also in certain foods that we eat:

- Blood cholesterol is produced by the liver and is essential for maintaining cells and hormones - without a certain amount, the body would cease to function properly.
- Dietary cholesterol is found in some foods like shellfish, liver, kidney and eggs.

## What are LDL and HDL cholesterol?

- Low-Density Lipoproteins (LDL) carry cholesterol from the liver to the rest of the body. About 70% of cholesterol in the blood is carried as LDL cholesterol, but very high levels can increase the risk of CHD, which is why it is sometimes referred to as "bad cholesterol".
- High-Density Lipoproteins (HDL) take excess cholesterol back to the liver for disposal from the body and, for this reason, HDL cholesterol is also known as "good cholesterol".

## What happens if I have a high level of blood cholesterol?

Too much LDL cholesterol in the blood can cause a build-up of fatty material in the arteries (the blood vessels which supply the heart), slowing down the flow of blood. If they are then blocked by a blood clot, the blood flow to the heart stops completely, causing a heart attack.

## How can I lower my blood cholesterol level and reduce the risk of a heart attack?

- In some cases high blood cholesterol can be hereditary, so if you have a strong family history of heart disease, you should have your blood cholesterol level checked by your doctor.
- Maintaining a healthy weight, increasing your level of exercise and cutting back on smoking will all help to control your blood fat and cholesterol levels. Try to include a little activity every day - take the stairs rather than the lift, and walk or cycle instead of driving short distances.

- It used to be thought that dietary cholesterol could cause high blood cholesterol, but recent research has shown that this is more likely to be caused by too much fat in the diet - especially saturated fat. Try these simple tips for reducing your fat intake:
- **Cut down on butter, cream, full fat cheeses, fatty meats, pastry, cakes and biscuits, which are high in saturates.**
- **Choose leaner cuts of meat and trim off visible fat**
- **Look for lower fat dairy products like semi or skimmed milk and low fat yoghurt**
- **Check food labels for fat content**
- **Spread butter or margarine thinly, and try to use smaller amounts of oil for cooking - measure it out with a spoon or use a spray vegetable oil**
- **Where possible, eat polyunsaturates (found in vegetable oils such as corn and sunflower oil and in oily fish like salmon, sardines and mackerel) and monounsaturates (found in olive and rapeseed oil), both of which have a beneficial effect on blood cholesterol levels.**

## **Do I have to cut down on eggs?**

Eggs do contain dietary cholesterol, but we now know that it's too much saturated fat that's more likely to raise blood cholesterol levels rather than eating foods containing cholesterol. Eggs are relatively low in saturated fat, and most healthy people can eat an egg a day without increasing their blood cholesterol levels. Eggs are a great source of protein, essential vitamins and minerals, so they can make an important contribution to a healthy diet.

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