

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary Template

Title: High Blood Cholesterol: What You Can Do.

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Plain Language Summary:

Why Is High Blood Cholesterol Important To You?

High blood cholesterol is one of the major factors that increase your risk of developing heart disease, which is the number one killer of both men and women in the United States. The higher your blood cholesterol, the more likely you will have heart disease or suffer from a heart attack. Cholesterol forms plaques in your blood vessels and block the flow of blood, leading to heart disease.

Other factors that increase your chance of having a heart attack include cigarette smoking, high blood pressure (higher than 140/90), age (men over 45 years and women over 55 years), and family history of early heart disease (heart disease in father or brother before age 55; heart disease in mother or sister before age 65). Statistics have shown that every year in the U.S., about 1 million Americans have heart attacks. So it is very important that you keep your cholesterol in check to decrease your chance of having a heart attack.

What Do Your Cholesterol Numbers Mean For You?

You can know your cholesterol numbers through lipid panel that is part of the blood test obtained during your annual health exam. This blood test is done after a 9 to 12 hour fast. The result includes total cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol, HDL (good) cholesterol, and triglycerides. Your goal of total cholesterol level should be less than 200 mg/dL. LDL cholesterol is the culprit in blocking your blood vessels. HDL cholesterol helps prevent the plaque buildup and helps protect against heart disease. Your goal is to have a low LDL level (less than 100 mg/dL) and a high HDL level (more than 60mg/dL). Triglycerides are another form of fat and can also raise the risk of heart disease. Research has shown those with heart disease or who has had a heart attack in the past can prolong their life and improve their life quality by lowering their LDL level and raising their HDL level.

What Can You Do To Decrease Your “Bad” LDL Cholesterol And Increase Your “Good” HDL Cholesterol?

Many things affect your cholesterol levels. Things that affect your cholesterol but are outside your control include age, gender, and gene. Things that affect your cholesterol but you can do something about include diet, weight, and physical activity. Diet high in saturated fat and cholesterol, being overweight, and living a sedentary lifestyle will all raise your “bad” LDL cholesterol and lower your “good” HDL cholesterol. Talk to your doctor about TLC (therapeutic lifestyle changes) today to find out what you can do to keep your LDL level in check.

Also, your doctor can further work with you on a drug treatment that will help you further lower your LDL level and raise your HDL level. The most common and effective drug is statin. Statin can be taken by itself and the dosage can be adjusted to achieve maximum effect. Also, statin can be combined with another drug called Ezetimibe (also called Zetia) to even more effectively achieve your goal LDL level. Talk to your doctor to plan the best drug treatment that will not only lower your LDL level but also reduce the risk of a heart attack.

Additional Resources:

For more information:

Medline Plus <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/cholesterol.html>

National Cholesterol Education Program

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/index.htm#chol>

Key Words:

Zetia

LDL cholesterol level

Lipid panel

Cardiovascular disease risks

Atherosclerosis

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Family Medicine Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up-to-date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.