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Preventing Heat Stroke

CHOLESTEROL COUNT

Many 20- and 30-somethings think cholesterol is something their parents and grandparents need to worry about. In reality, however, even the younger generation's most active and fit people can experience elevated cholesterol levels.

What do the numbers mean?

If your doctor looks at your lab work and quotes your overall cholesterol number, ask for the full story. You will want to know the breakdown of LDL (bad) cholesterol, HDL (good) cholesterol, triglycerides, and particle size. Having the full story presents a much more accurate picture than simply total cholesterol. (See side bar for recommended levels).

If cholesterol levels are elevated, your doctor may give you three months to modify your diet and exercise, then ask you to return for another test. If cholesterol levels remain high, medication is often recommended.

While drug therapy works for many, other people may experience negative side effects. And some people simply don't want to take prescription medications.

In addition to a healthy diet and regular exercise, here are some natural alternatives to help improve cholesterol levels:

Niacin (vitamin B₃)

Niacin is available in prescription strengths of 500 mg or higher, but over-the-counter supplement forms of niacin usually come in strengths of 250 mg or less.

While niacin only reduces LDL cholesterol by about 5% to 25% (compared to 18% to 55% with statin drugs), it can decrease triglycerides by 20% to 50% and increase HDL by 15% to 35%.

Since very high doses of niacin are required for hyperlipidemia, the dietary supplement niacin usually isn't appropriate. 1200 – 1500 mg daily is recommended for the most pronounced increases in HDL and decreases in triglycerides. Niacin's greatest effects on LDL occur at 2000-3000 mg/day.

Supplementing with niacin can cause flushing, and is associated with elevated liver function tests, so it's wise to take niacin only under a physician's supervision.

Red Yeast

Supplementing with red yeast can significantly lower total and LDL cholesterol levels, and triglycerides. Some research shows that it may be as effective as Zocor for improving lipid profiles. The dose used most commonly is 2.4 grams per day, but a dose of 1.2 grams per day provides some benefit.

Since red yeast contains substances similar to statin drugs, it is likely to cause similar side effects, including elevated liver enzymes and neuromuscular disorders.

Beta-Sitosterol

Beta-sitosterol, a plant sterol, is a dietary supplement most commonly found in the butter-style spread Take Control. It's been shown to significantly reduce total and LDL cholesterol levels, but has little or no effect on HDL cholesterol levels. The recommended dose is 800 mg to 6 grams per day, which translates to one to three servings of Take Control each day.

Sitostanol

Sitostanol is an ingredient in the functional food product Benecol margarine and in some salad dressings. Like beta-sitosterol, supplementing with sitostanol can help reduce total and LDL cholesterol levels.

Research shows that it's effective in about 88% of patients when used alone or in combination with a low-fat diet or statin drugs. Maximum cholesterol-lowering effects occur at about 2 grams per day. This translates to about two to three servings of sitostanol-fortified foods daily.

Psyllium

Taking psyllium orally reduces cholesterol levels in patients with mild to moderate hypercholesterolemia.

Adding psyllium seed or seed husk to food, or taking it in supplement form, can reduce levels of total cholesterol by 3% to 14% and LDL cholesterol by 5% to 10%. It also significantly reduces the LDL to HDL ratio. The recommended dose is approximately 10-12 grams daily.

Flaxseed

Various forms of flaxseed, including ground, partially defatted, and flaxseed breads and muffins seem to significantly reduce total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol levels. Flaxseed doesn't significantly impact HDL cholesterol, and it doesn't seem to have much effect on LDL in postmenopausal women.

A daily intake of 40 to 50 grams of flaxseed (six to eight tablespoons) seems to reduce total cholesterol by 5% to 9% and LDL cholesterol by 8% to 18%.

Oats

Oats, oat bran, and other soluble fibers can reduce total and LDL cholesterol, in conjunction with a diet low in saturated and trans fat. A daily intake of two to five ounces of whole oat products (containing 3.6-10 grams of soluble fiber) is recommended.

Total Cholesterol Levels

Less than 200 mg/dL	Desirable
200–239 mg/dL	Borderline-High Risk
240 mg/dL and over	High Risk

LDL Cholesterol Levels

Less than 100 mg/dL	Optimal
100 to 129 mg/dL	Near Optimal/ Above Optimal
130 to 159 mg/dL	Borderline High
160 to 189 mg/dL	High
190 mg/dL and above	Very High

HDL Cholesterol Levels

Less than 40 mg/dL for men	Elevated risk for heart disease
Less than 50 mg/dL for women	
40 to 50 mg/dL for men	Average
50 to 60 mg/dL for women	
60 mg/dL and above	Better protection against heart disease

Triglyceride Levels

Less than 150 mg/dL	Optimal
150 to 199 mg/dL	Borderline High
200 to 499 mg/dL	High
55 mg/dL and above	Very High

Soy

Consuming soy protein in place of other dietary proteins seems to modestly reduce total cholesterol and LDL levels in some studies. Other studies, however, have shown no significant benefit of supplementing with soy. To improve the cholesterol profile, the typical dose is 20-50 grams of soy protein daily.

In Summary

Cholesterol numbers tell only part of the story when it comes to your cardiovascular health. Inflammatory markers, blood pressure, blood sugar, weight, and lifestyle all play significant roles as well. Make it a point to get regular physical exams

and blood work. An easy way to remember is to schedule yearly checkups on your birthday. After all, can you think of a better gift to give yourself than the gift of good.



Molly Kimball, RD is a sports and lifestyle nutritionist who can be reached at 504.842.9572. H&M