**What is cholesterol?**

Cholesterol is a substance that is found naturally in the body which helps our bodies to function properly. Most of our bodies’ cholesterol is made in the liver; some also comes from our diet and what we eat. Cholesterol only becomes a problem when the level in your blood is too high, if you have more cholesterol than your body needs then it can cause a build up of fatty deposits in your arteries which increase the risk of heart disease. There are two main types of cholesterol, these are:

LDL - (Low density lipoprotein). This is known as bad cholesterol, as it can slowly build up in the walls of your arteries, making them narrower.

HDL – (High density lipoprotein) This is known as good cholesterol because it removes excess cholesterol from your bloodstream and returns it to your liver. HDL cholesterol helps to protect against heart disease.

The ratio of HDL to LDL is important; the aim is to increase levels of HDL and to lower levels of LDL.

**What should your cholesterol levels be?**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Recommended for healthy adults | Recommended  For high-risk adults |
| Total  cholesterol | Less than 5 mmol/l | Less than 4 mmol/l |
| LDL  (Bad) | Less than 3  mmol/l | Less than 2 mmol/l |
| HDL (Good) | More than 1 mmol/l | More than 1 mmol/l |

**Some helpful advice about your cholesterol**

* Two out of three adults in the UK have raised cholesterol, which is a major risk factor for heart disease.

Raised cholesterol is a major risk of heart disease, and it is important to know your level of cholesterol so that you can take action to improve or maintain your heart health. Measuring your cholesterol level is quite simple – it involves a blood test. If you have a family history of heart disease or are concerned that you have high cholesterol, speak with your doctor who will be able to advise you.

Cardiovascular disease can affect anyone, and coronary heart disease alone causes more than 90,000 deaths a year in the UK. Heart disease has multiple risk factors, some of which you can’t change, such as family history of heart problems and getting older. However, leading a healthier diet and lifestyle can go a long way to help lower your risk.

High cholesterol is recognised alongside obesity, smoking, type 2 diabetes, stress and lack of exercise as one of the main causes alongside heart disease. Remember you may need to alter more than one of these to reduce your overall risk.

The most common cause of a high cholesterol level is eating too much saturated fat. Family history, being physically inactive, being overweight, excess alcohol consumption and smoking can also affect cholesterol levels. The good news is that these things can be changed to help lower your cholesterol and improve your hearts health.

**How to lower your cholesterol?**

1. **Reduce your intake of saturated fat**

Saturated fat is found in high fat dairy foods such as cheese, milk, butter and in fatty cuts of meat. It is also found in cakes, biscuits and pastries. It may also be hidden in already prepared foods, such as ready meals. A way to check how much saturated fat is in what you eat it is a good idea to check the nutrition labels found on food packaging upon buying your food items. Women should aim to eat no more than 20g saturated fat per day, and men no more than 30g.

1. **Introduce cholesterol lowering foods**

You can buy certain products that will help lower your cholesterol. These products contain ingredients that are clinically proven to lower cholesterol. You can get items such as butters, spreads, yogurts, mini drinks.

1. **Eat more fruit, veg and fibre-rich foods**

Aim to eat at least 5 potions of fruit and vegetables a day. They can be fresh, tinned or frozen fruit and vegetables. Eating foods that contain soluble fibre, such as oats, beans and lentils can also help to lower cholesterol.

1. **Be active!**

Physical activity can help to improve good HDL cholesterol levels. Aim for 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise such as brisk walking or cycling at least 5 times a week.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Food group** | **LIMIT THESE FOODS** | **HEALTHIER FOODS** |
| **Meat** | Sausages, Pate, Bacon, Hamburgers, Hot dogs | Lean cuts of beef, Chicken and Turkey without the skin |
| **Fish** | Fried Fish, Fish in batter | White and oily fish (grilled, steamed, poached), Grilled fish fingers, Tinned fish in brine, spring water or tomato sauce |
| **Dairy** | Cream, Full fat hard cheese, Stilton, Cream cheeses, Whole milk | Reduced fat hard cheese, Low fat fromage frais, skimmed or semi-skimmed milk |
| **Fruit & Veg** | Roast potatoes, Mixed Salads in mayonnaise, full fat coleslaw and potato salad | All fresh, frozen, tinned or dried fruit or vegetables and salads without oils or sauces. Boiled, mash or baked potatoes |
| **Desserts** | Cakes, Pastries, Cheesecake, Pies, Puddings, Ice creams, Chocolate, Fudge, Toffee | Low fat ice cream or frozen yogurt  Low-fat fruit yogurt |
| **Drinks** | Milkshakes, Hot chocolate, Full fat milk | Tea and filter coffee with semi skimmed milk, Herbal teas, Mineral water, No added sugar fruit juices and squashes |
| **Carbohydrates** | Ready made garlic bread, Waffles, Pasta in creamy sauce | Whole-wheat bread, Wholegrain breakfast cereals, Pasta with low fat sauce, Brown Rice |
| **Fats and Oils** | Butter, Lard, Dripping | Reduced fat spreads, Olive oils, Rapeseed/Canola or sunflower oils |

* If you would like further information on your cholesterol you can visit your GP, Visit [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)