

High Cholesterol

Millions of Americans are told they have high cholesterol, which increases their risk of developing heart disease. Cholesterol is a substance that we produce in our bodies and also consume in our diets. Cholesterol has many important functions in the human body, including the production of important hormones and vital nutrients such as Vitamin D. It can become harmful to health if it becomes oxidized or is a smaller dense form that can damage the artery lining and be involved in plaque formation.. This plaque can block the arteries, and the reduced blood flow can cause a heart attack or stroke.

The typical approach to lower cholesterol is the use of the “gold standard” pharmaceutical drugs, statins. However, statins have many risks and side effects. What’s worse, studies suggest they do not decrease overall mortality rates in people without existing cardiovascular disease. And with current prescribing guidelines created by the American College of Cardiology and the American Heart Association, experts warn the number of people who will be advised to take statins for life is likely to double.

An alternative approach to managing cholesterol is through your diet, lifestyle, and targeted nutritional supplements.

Contributing Factors

The following risk factors make you more likely to have high cholesterol:

- Smoking
- Obesity
- Poor diet
- Lack of exercise
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Family history of heart disease

Treatment Options

A key component of optimizing cholesterol with diet is to avoid eating a diet high in simple carbohydrates (these are processed and refined sugary foods). Simple carbohydrates increase the type of LDL that easily gets under the artery lining and causes the plaque formation, and also increases triglycerides, another cardiovascular disease risk factor. On the other hand, a diet that is high in unprocessed foods (whole grains, vegetables, fruit) to provide antioxidants that prevent damage to LDL and to the artery. A diet with healthy fats (from fish, seeds, nuts, avocados and olives) will increase HDL, a protective form of cholesterol, and create a light fluffy LDL that cannot get under the artery lining and cause plaque formation.

It is very important not to consume oils that are oxidized. These include healthy oils that have gotten too old or have been exposed to high heat and also oils often found in processed foods. These oxidized oils damage LDL and the artery lining itself through inflammation. With the decreased use of saturated (animal) fat in foods there has been an increase in the use of these plant-based oils that are easily oxidized. These oils are used to provide a fatty taste and texture to foods. When large amounts of vegetable oils become oxidized due to processing, heat or prolonged storage, these oils increase damaging LDL particles - much more readily than saturated fat ever did!

In addition to dietary changes, regular exercise and stress reduction can help keep cholesterol levels in a healthy profile. Also, several dietary supplements have been shown to help reduce cholesterol. Here are some most well researched dietary supplements for maintaining healthy cholesterol:

- Natural ratio stable fish oil
- Garlic
- Red yeast rice
- Pantethine
- Phytosterols

A comprehensive approach to cholesterol can help you successfully reduce heart disease risk while avoiding the risk of statins.