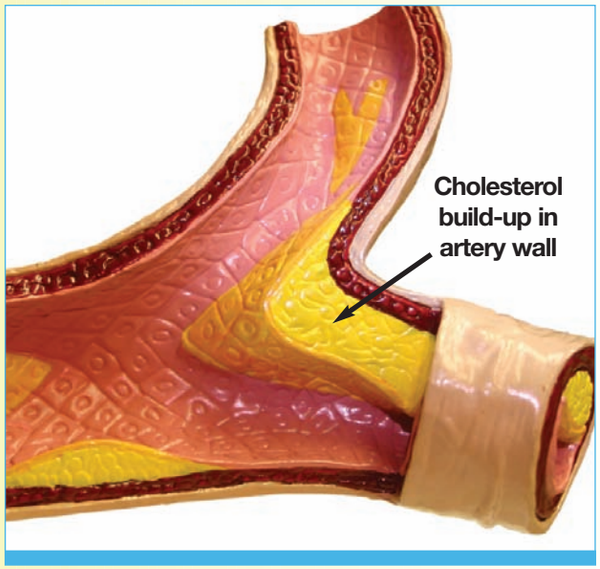

Why is cholesterol important?

High cholesterol levels in the blood can lead to a buildup of fat in the blood vessels, particularly the arteries in your heart. This is called atherosclerosis (or “hardening of the arteries”).

Know your blood cholesterol level

A simple blood test will provide information about two types of cholesterol: LDL (the “bad” cholesterol) and HDL (the “good” cholesterol).

If your LDL cholesterol is higher than 160, you need to try to reduce it. If you have diabetes or heart disease, your LDL goal may be as low as 100 or even 70. Ask your doctor what your LDL goal should be.

By contrast, “good” HDL cholesterol protects your heart. Having HDL over 60 is good for you, but a HDL under 40 may increase your risk of heart disease.

alosa
The Alosa Foundation

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF AGING

iDiS Independent Drug Information Service

The Independent Drug Information Service (iDiS) is supported by the PACE Program of the Department of Aging of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, and the Washington D.C. Department of Health.

This material is provided by The Alosa Foundation, a nonprofit educational organization that is not affiliated in any way with any pharmaceutical company.

These are general recommendations only; specific clinical decisions should be made by a doctor based on assessment of the individual patient.

For more information, see our website:
www.RxFacts.org

Balanced data about medications

Copyright ©2010 Alosa Foundation, All rights reserved.

April 2010

Take care of your cholesterol, and your heart will love you

Heart disease is the most common cause of hospitalization and death in the United States. Lowering cholesterol reduces the chances of having a heart attack or stroke and of dying from heart disease.

You can do a number of things to reduce your cholesterol level if it’s high. For some people, a better diet and more exercise will be enough. For others, medication may be needed.

alosa
The Alosa Foundation

iDiS Independent Drug Information Service

Balanced data about medications

Exercise and weight loss can make a difference

Being active and losing weight can bring down your bad (LDL) cholesterol, increase your good (HDL) cholesterol, and reduce your risk of heart disease. For some practical tips, go to the American Heart Association website: http://www.americanheart.org/

Cut down on the wrong kind of fat in your diet

Saturated fats drive up your cholesterol and can increase heart disease risk. They're in fried foods, red meats, fast foods, and high-fat dairy products. Check food labels, and eat only small amounts of saturated fats. But be careful not to replace them with items that may be lower in fat, but are high in sugar or other sources of calories.

You can also reduce your cholesterol levels by eating more healthy (and tasty!) foods like **grains, cereals, vegetables, fruits, and some margarines.**

For more information about what to eat to protect your heart, check out the USDA website: http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/

Yet another reason to quit tobacco

Smoking greatly increases your risk of having a heart attack or stroke, even if you have good cholesterol levels. **If you smoke, quit.**

When are drugs needed?

If diet and exercise aren't enough to reach your LDL cholesterol goal, you may need to add a medication.

Statins are the most common drugs for high cholesterol. For many patients, **an affordable generic statin such as lovastatin, pravastatin, or simvastatin can be enough to reach your cholesterol goal.**

It is very important to take your medication as prescribed, or it won't work well. If you think your cholesterol medicine is causing a side effect, such as muscle pain or weakness, talk to your doctor.