Most people with high cholesterol show no symptoms. Therefore, it is important to have your cholesterol checked by your doctor with a blood test.

HOW YOUR HEART WORKS AND WHAT CAUSES HEART DISEASE

A healthy heart is essential for a healthy life. It beats over 100,000 times each day. It supplies oxygen to every muscle and organ in your body through a network of veins and arteries. Many risk factors contribute to your risk of heart disease such as your age, gender and ethnicity. These risk factors cannot be changed. Some other risk factors such as smoking, high blood pressure and high cholesterol are linked to diet and lifestyle, which can be impacted by a change in habits.

A SURVEY IN 2011-12 FOUND THAT MORE THAN ONE-THIRD OF ALL AUSTRALIANS HAD HIGH TOTAL CHOLESTEROL.

THE EFFECTS OF HIGH CHOLESTEROL

High cholesterol is an established risk factor for heart disease and lowering your cholesterol helps to reduce your risk of events such as:

• **Heart attack**: Life-threatening heart attacks are caused by a sudden blockage of the arteries supplying blood to the heart.

• **Stroke**: Stroke is caused by sudden blockage or rupture of the arteries supplying blood to the brain and can result in impaired function or death.

You could also be at a higher risk of developing heart disease if you have:

• **Diabetes**

• **Chronic Kidney Disease**

• **High Blood Pressure**

• **Family History of Cardiovascular Disease**

• **Obesity**

• **Older age**

• **Smoking**

**SUMMARY**

- To reduce ‘bad cholesterol’ limit the intake of saturated fats and trans-fats
- Include foods which contain polyunsaturated and monosaturated fats to increase ‘good cholesterol’
- Modifiable factors include lifestyle (weight, exercising and smoking) and dietary changes
- Have your cholesterol and triglycerides checked by your doctor regularly

Cholesterol is a fatty substance that’s carried around in your blood. Your body produces some cholesterol naturally and you can also get it from some foods where it is used for many bodily functions. However, this can be a problem if there is too much of it in your blood. The two main types of blood cholesterol are:

- **Low-density lipoprotein (LDL)** ‘bad’ cholesterol can add to the build-up of cholesterol and plaque in your arteries and increase your risk of heart disease.

- **High-density lipoprotein (HDL)** ‘good’ cholesterol helps to reduce cholesterol build-up and protect against heart disease.

Cholesterol levels are affected by ‘modifiable’ and ‘non-modifiable’ risk factors.

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<tr>
<th><strong>‘Good’ cholesterol</strong></th>
<th><strong>‘Bad’ cholesterol</strong></th>
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<td>Smoking</td>
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<td>Diet</td>
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For a healthier heart, and to help lower cholesterol levels, try making some of the following changes to your diet:

- **Eat Less saturated fat**
  Saturated fats are found in fatty meats, cakes, pies, biscuits, fried & takeaway food, full cream dairy products and coconut products. Eating too much can raise your cholesterol levels. Replace foods high in saturated fat for those containing unsaturated fats.

- **Choose polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats and oils**
  These unsaturated or good fats can help lower cholesterol. Choose these fats instead of saturated fats. They are found in sunflower oil, olive oil, canola oil, polyunsaturated margarine, oily fish, avocado & nuts.

- **Include omega-3 fats in your diet three times per week**
  Omega-3 fats are heart protective. Good sources include oily fish (e.g. salmon, tuna, sardines) & nuts.

- **Increase your soluble fibre intake**
  Soluble fibre binds to cholesterol and helps to remove excess cholesterol from the body, lowering cholesterol levels. Foods high in soluble fibre include fruits, vegetables, legumes (e.g. baked beans and lentils) and rolled oats.

A WORD ON EGGS

Eggs are a good source of protein, vitamins and minerals and can be enjoyed as part of a healthy diet, even when you are trying to lower your cholesterol. Eggs contain healthy polyunsaturated fat and only small amounts of saturated fat. The dietary cholesterol level in eggs has only a small impact on LDL (bad) cholesterol.

WHAT ARE PLANT STEROLS?

Plant sterols (or phytosterols) naturally occur in all plants. They are found in vegetable oils, nuts, legumes, grains and cereals. Plant sterols compete with cholesterol for absorption in the small intestine, which can stop cholesterol from being absorbed.

If you have high blood cholesterol, it is recommended that you consume 2 TO 3 GRAMS OF PLANT STEROLS* EACH DAY. In Australia, margarine spreads, breakfast cereals, low-fat yoghurt and low-fat milk are enriched with plant sterols (check packaging to choose the brands with added plant sterols). It is recommended that you consume 2-3 serves per day of these foods (along with at least one daily serve of fruit or vegetable high in beta-carotene).

*Individuals with sitosterolaemia should restrict their intake of plant sterols.

HEALTHY EATING - TO HELP LOWER CHOLESTEROL

Incorporating plant sterols daily in your diet has been shown to lower LDL cholesterol by up to 10%.
MEDICATIONS

There are a number of different types of medications that can help lower your cholesterol if you haven’t been able to reach your cholesterol goal with diet and lifestyle changes.

1. **Statins** a group of medicines called statins are the recommended first option for treatment of high cholesterol. Statin treatment helps reduce your ‘bad’ cholesterol and the risk of heart attack and stroke.

2. **Dual Therapy** may need to add other medications to help you achieve a healthy cholesterol level. Second options include ezetimibe, a bile acid binding resin or nicotinic acid. Depending on what treatment your doctor recommends, there may be a combination tablet available to you.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle continues to be important while taking cholesterol medication. Regular visits with your doctor are important to:

- Help you maintain a healthy lifestyle
- Reach your cholesterol goal
- Manage any potential side effects of your medication

References: