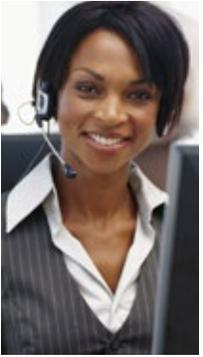




BalanceHealthSM Newsletter

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Understanding Cholesterol

September is National Cholesterol Education Month. Cholesterol can be a tricky topic as there is “good” cholesterol and “bad” cholesterol. In addition, there is always debate if cholesterol itself leads to high cholesterol or if it is actually fat content that can cause unhealthy cholesterol levels. Understanding cholesterol is so important because it can be a major contributor to health issues such as heart disease.

Cholesterol is a waxy fatty substance found in all cells in the body. Your body does need some cholesterol to make hormones, Vitamin D, and substances that help with digestion. Cholesterol travels through your bloodstream in small packages called lipoproteins. These packages are made of fat on the inside and proteins on the outside.

There are two types of lipoproteins that carry cholesterol throughout your body: low-density lipoproteins (LDL) and high-density lipoproteins (HDL). It is important to have healthy levels of both lipoproteins.

LDL cholesterol is often referred to as “bad” cholesterol as high LDL levels can lead to a buildup of cholesterol in your arteries. While HDL cholesterol is often

called “good” cholesterol as it carries cholesterol from other parts of your body back to your liver. Your liver then removes the cholesterol from your body.

The problem is that your body generally makes all the cholesterol you need to function normally, but there are also substances in many foods that add cholesterol to your diet. Consuming too much of these foods on a regular basis can lead to high cholesterol.

People who have high cholesterol have a greater chance of getting coronary heart disease, which is a condition where plaque made up of cholesterol, fat, calcium, and other substances build up inside the arteries. Over time, this plaque narrows and hardens the arteries, limiting the flow of oxygen rich blood to the heart. Eventually, this can lead to a heart attack. Plaque can also build up in other arteries in the body that bring oxygen rich blood to the limbs and brain, which can lead to stroke and/or peripheral arterial disease.

The twist is that the higher the level of LDL cholesterol in your blood, the greater your chance is of getting heart

For more information or advice about cholesterol, contact your Wellness Coordinator by calling:

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disease. However, the higher the level of HDL cholesterol in your blood, the lower your chance is of getting heart disease.

High cholesterol often has no signs or symptoms, so it is a good idea to have your cholesterol levels tested. WebMD suggests that everyone ages 20 to 79 get their cholesterol checked every 4 to 6 years, unless you have certain risk factors for high cholesterol, then you will most likely need to be checked more frequently. It is recommended that adults consult with their doctor on how often they should have their cholesterol checked.

There are some risk factors for high cholesterol such as age and heredity that cannot be managed, but there are a variety of things you can do to reduce cholesterol and/or maintain healthy cholesterol levels.

Exercise

Regular physical activity has been shown to reduce “bad” cholesterol and can actually raise “good” cholesterol by up to 10%. Try to aim for around 10,000 steps per day and exercise 5 days per week. Experts agree that any form of exercise can be beneficial, so hit the weights, take a hike, ride your bike, attend a yoga class, or go for a swim, it all counts! Also, if you work at a desk try to get up and walk around for five minutes every hour.

Avoid Saturated Fat

Foods that are high in saturated fat actually raise cholesterol much more than foods that are high in cholesterol such as eggs. One of the first things doctors recommend for reducing cholesterol is reducing the saturated fat in your diet. Avoid or limit foods such as fatty beef, lard and cream, butter, full fat cheese, fried foods, and pre-baked goods.

Consume Healthy Fats

“Healthy” fats which consist of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fat can help lower cholesterol. Fatty fish such as salmon is a great source of cholesterol lowering omega-3 fatty acids. Nuts are also high in healthy fats, which can bring modest reductions in cholesterol. Walnuts and almonds are shown to be particularly beneficial. Cooking with olive and canola oil is also a great alternative to butter as both are high in healthy fats.

Eat Fiber

Soluble fiber has been shown to help lower cholesterol as it “acts like a sponge to absorb cholesterol” in the digestive tract. Good sources of fiber include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, dried beans, oats, and barley.

Go Green

Research has shown that green tea contains compounds that can help lower LDL cholesterol. In addition, it is a great alternative to soda and other sugary beverages.

Don't Smoke

Smoking lowers levels of HDL “good” cholesterol and is a major risk factor for heart disease in its own right.

Remember that eni's wellness coaches are available for additional tips on lowering cholesterol and/or maintaining healthy cholesterol levels.

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