

Your Cholesterol Numbers - 2 Ways to Control Them

Contributed by Webmaster

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Cholesterol is an essential part of life. It is produced by the liver which synthesises about 1 gramme per day. This substance is classified as a sterol (a combination of steroid and alcohol).

Cholesterol forms an essential component of cell membranes of mammals. It is the main precursor of vitamin D and of the steroid hormones such as cortisol and aldosterone and the sex hormones (oestrogens, testosterone and progesterone). It also is essential in the formation of the myelin sheath which wraps around nerves and helps to conduct nerve impulses.

An excessively high cholesterol, however is associated with atherosclerosis, which is essentially a narrowing and clogging up of arteries with a complex of cholesterol in a scaffolding of scar tissue. This narrowing of blood flow through arteries has the most significant effect in the heart (where it may cause heart attacks) and in the brain (where it is associated with strokes).

According to the lipid theory, raised levels of total cholesterol, as well as LDL cholesterol (commonly called bad cholesterol), as well as low levels of HDL cholesterol (commonly called good cholesterol) are associated with a higher risk of heart attacks, strokes and peripheral vascular disease.

Heart attacks are recognised as one of the major causes of death in the civilised world. So how does one go about controlling cholesterol levels in the blood?

As mentioned earlier, most of the cholesterol in your body is synthesised in the liver, with some being produced by the intestines, the adrenals, and the reproductive organs. A small portion comes from the diet, and this is seen in animal fat, brain, cheese, egg yolk, beef, pork, poultry, shrimps and cuttlefish. Consumption of trans fats and saturated fats also contribute greatly to a raised cholesterol level in the blood.

One very important way of controlling cholesterol numbers is by controlling the diet. Reduced consumption of high cholesterol foods such as animal fats, brain, cheese, egg yolk, etc as well as avoidance of the usage of trans fats and saturated fats in cooking will significantly reduce the blood cholesterol levels.

However in a great majority of cases, controlling cholesterol by reducing the consumption of high cholesterol foods is not enough. Thus one needs to turn to medication which helps reduce one's high cholesterol level.

One of the most recent, and most popular of drugs that help reduce cholesterol production is a group of drugs known as statins. These drugs inhibit an important enzyme in the liver called HMG CoA reductase that is essential for the production of cholesterol.

The most popular of statins so far is known as Lipitor, also commonly referred to as Lipator or Liptor. This drug is well known to be very effective in reducing tremendously the high cholesterol levels which formerly were known to be very stubborn to dietary control. Lipitor or Lipator is produced by Pfizer, a world renowned maker of another very popular drug called Viagra.

Since cholesterol is being continuously produced by the liver, it is an accepted fact of life that cholesterol medication will need to be taken for life. Fortunately Lipitor (Lipitor) has been shown to have very few side effects, which tend to be mostly mild, and because of this, it is still highly recommended by medical professionals throughout the world.

The side effects of Lipitor are worth mentioning. The most common side effects of Lipitor are headache and nausea. Other statin side effects have been seen, however, which, although rare, are still of some concern. These are problems like a mild to moderate rise in the liver enzymes such as GGT, AST and ALT, all of which seem to indicate a mild damage to liver cells.

Some patients on Lipitor complain of muscle aches, and these seem to correlate well with a rise of the muscle enzyme creatine kinase in the blood, indicating some degree of muscle damage. These rise in enzyme levels, however, are thought to be harmless as long as they are minimal rises, and can be seen to drop to normal levels within a couple of months after cessation of the Lipitor, or after a reduction of the dosage given.

Moderate rises in liver or muscle enzymes are an indication to cease therapy with statins and the adoption of other therapeutic measures such as a more stringent dietary control or a usage of other lipid-lowering drugs such as fibrate derivatives or nicotinic acid.

Fibrates however do not work very well in reducing cholesterol. Nicotinic acid, although effective in reducing LDL cholesterol and raising HDL cholesterol, as well as lowering triglycerides, have some frequent undesirable side effects such as flushing, itching and gastrointestinal upset).

Worried about your cholesterol numbers? Take steps to reduce your risks of heart attacks and strokes. Visit LipitorGuide at <http://lipitorguide.com> for more information. Tony Wong is a medical practitioner.