



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

About Hyperlipidemia (High Cholesterol)

This information explains what hyperlipidemia is, and how to treat it.

Hyperlipidemia (also known as high cholesterol) is a condition that happens when you have high levels of lipids (fats or cholesterol) in your blood. Having high levels of lipids in your blood can narrow or block your arteries. The lipids can stick to and harden the walls of your arteries, leading to heart problems such as cardiovascular (heart) disease later on.

Having hyperlipidemia increases your risk for cardiovascular (heart) diseases, such as heart attack, stroke, and peripheral vascular disease (having fatty deposits in your blood vessels).

Types of lipids include:

- Cholesterol, a waxy type of fat your body makes. It comes from what you eat. There are 2 types of cholesterol:
 - LDL cholesterol, which is known as “bad cholesterol.” High levels of LDL cholesterol can increase your risk of heart disease.
 - HDL cholesterol, which is known as “good cholesterol.” Low levels of HDL cholesterol can increase your risk of cardiovascular disease.
- Triglycerides are another type of fat found in your blood. High levels of triglycerides increase your risk of cardiovascular disease.

Testing for Hyperlipidemia

You will need a blood test to find out what your lipid levels are. If they're higher than what's recommended, you have hyperlipidemia. Cholesterol and lipid levels are measured in milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per deciliter (dL) of blood.

Normal lipid levels are:

- LDL cholesterol: less than 130 mg/dL
- HDL cholesterol: greater than 40 mg/dL
- Triglycerides: less than 150 mg/dL

The recommended levels may be lower if you have diabetes. This test must be done on an empty stomach, and you won't be able to eat or drink anything but water for 9 to 12 hours before the blood test. Ask your doctor how long you should fast (not eat or drink) before your test.

Treatment for Hyperlipidemia

Lifestyle changes

- Lose weight, if you're overweight.
- Eat a healthy diet, including lots of fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid foods with a lot of saturated fat, such as red meat, butter, fried foods, and cheese. For more information about eating healthy, read *Eat Your Way to Better Health* (www.mskcc.org/pe/eat_better_health). You may also want to talk to a dietitian about your diet.
- If you smoke, reduce the amount that you smoke. For help, call our Tobacco Treatment Program at 212-610-0507. You can also ask your nurse for information about the program.
- Do something active (such as walking, biking, gardening) for at least 30 minutes each day, if you're able. If you need a referral for a physical therapist, talk with your doctor.

Medication

There are many types of medication you can use to treat hyperlipidemia. These medications work in different ways. The following are some examples, but there are others. Your doctor will decide which medications are right for you based on your age, your LDL cholesterol levels, and other conditions you may have.

- Statins decrease the amount of cholesterol your body makes. Examples include atorvastatin (Lipitor®) and rosuvastatin (Crestor®).

- Ezetimibe (Zetia®), reduces the amount of cholesterol that your body absorbs.
- Bile acid sequestrants decrease the amount of cholesterol that your intestines (gut) absorb from food. One example is cholestyramine (Locholest®, Prevalite®).
- Niacin (Vitamin B3), is a vitamin that helps lower cholesterol.
- Fibrates lower your triglyceride levels and raise your HDL levels. One example is gemfibrozil (Lopid®).
- Nutritional supplements, such as fish oil and soy protein, may also help lower your cholesterol. Talk with your doctor before taking any dietary supplements.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

About Hyperlipidemia (High Cholesterol) - Generated on June 29, 2019

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