



## **MERCY MEDICAL GROUP**

### **High Cholesterol (Hypercholesterolemia)**

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#### **DEFINITION**

Cholesterol is a type of fat that is made by your body naturally, as well as being found in animal-based foods. You need a small amount to make and maintain nerve cells and hormones. High cholesterol can be caused by eating foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol; however it can also be inherited or caused by another disease (hypothyroidism or diabetes).

Not all types of cholesterol are the same. High density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol can actually protect against heart disease and is thought of as “good cholesterol.” Low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol is the “bad” kind that builds up to cause blockages in blood vessels, leading to heart attack, stroke or other problems. Total cholesterol is a combination of HDL, LDL and triglycerides.

When there is too much bad cholesterol in the blood you can be at risk for heart disease.

#### **POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS**

Cholesterol can cause blockages in blood vessels. Too much cholesterol in the blood increases the risk for heart disease and stroke. High cholesterol is a silent disease and usually does not cause symptoms. You can be diagnosed by a blood test to check your cholesterol level.

Your family members may also be at risk for high cholesterol. They should be checked if they have not been tested yet. Doctors and researchers are formulating guidelines for evaluation of cholesterol in children. Ask your children’s doctor about when to check them.

#### **NORMAL CHOLESTEROL LEVELS**

Normal levels of cholesterol are those that keep the risk of heart disease as low as possible. Guidelines for adults are:

- Total cholesterol levels less than 200mg/dL
- LDL less than 130mg/dL
- Triglycerides less than 200mg/dL.

Whether an individual patient needs to be treated depends not only on total and LDL cholesterol levels, but also on other risk factors such as prior heart disease, obesity, gender, diabetes, smoking and high blood pressure. For instance, a patient with an otherwise borderline risk for heart disease based on cholesterol levels would actually be at high risk if there were two or more additional risk factors. Contact your health care professional for your individual cholesterol goals based on your risks.

#### **TREATMENT**

- Discuss with your doctor whether you need medicine to help lower your cholesterol level
- Read labels on food packages
- Eat low-fat, low-cholesterol foods – the American Heart Association recommends limiting cholesterol in your diet to 300 milligrams per day
- Lose weight if you are overweight

- Discuss an exercise program with your doctor
- Stop smoking.