

# Message from the Parish Nurses

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## BE HEART SMART

### ~ CHOLESTEROL MATTERS ~

**Cholesterol is a waxy substance that's found in the fats (lipids) in your blood. Your body needs cholesterol to continue building new healthy cells. Having too much of the bad cholesterol or not enough of the good cholesterol increases the chances that cholesterol will slowly build up in the inner walls of arteries that feed the heart and brain. High cholesterol can be inherited, but it's often the results of unhealthy lifestyle choices. Learning about your choices can make it preventable and treatable.**

### WHY CHOLESTEROL MATTERS

Cholesterol circulates in the blood, and as blood cholesterol levels rise, so does the risk to your health. That's why it's important that everyone should start getting tested for cholesterol levels and other risk factors at age 20 and then every 4-6 years. High cholesterol is one of the major controllable risk factors for coronary heart disease, heart attack, and stroke. If you have other risk factors such as cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, or diabetes, this risk increases even more.

### UNDERSTANDING CHOLESTEROL

Cholesterol is carried through your bloodstream by carriers made of fat (lipid) and protein. These are called lipoproteins. A blood test called a lipoprotein panel can help show whether you're at risk for coronary heart disease. This blood test is done after a 9-12 hour fast and gives information about your:

- **Low-density lipoprotein (LDL)** or “**bad**”. LDL cholesterol contributes to fatty buildups in the arteries (atherosclerosis). Plaque buildups narrow arteries and raise the risk of heart attack, stroke and peripheral artery disease (narrowed arteries in the legs).
- **High-density lipoprotein (HDL)** or “**good**”. HDL cholesterol picks up excess cholesterol away from the arteries and back to the liver. There it's broken down and passed from the body.
- **Total Cholesterol**. This isn't a type of cholesterol. The total cholesterol score is calculated by adding the HDL and LDL cholesterol levels and 20 percent of the triglycerides.
- **Triglycerides**. Triglycerides are the most common type of fat in the body and they store excess energy

from your diet. A high triglyceride level combined with low HDL cholesterol or high LDL cholesterol is linked with fatty buildups in artery walls. This increases the risk of heart attack and stroke.

### RISK FACTORS

Major risk factors that affect your LDL goal are:

- Cigarette smoking
- High blood pressure (140/90 mmHg or higher or on blood pressure medication)
- Low HDL cholesterol (less than 40mg/dl)
- Heredity- family history
- Age (men 45 years or older, women 55 years or older)

### INTERPRETING THE NUMBERS

In the United States, cholesterol levels are measured in milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per deciliter (dl) of blood. A fasting lipoprotein blood test will show the following results:

#### LDL (Bad) Cholesterol Level

- |                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| • Less than 100 | Optimal         |
| • 100-129       | Near Optimal    |
| • 130-159       | Borderline High |
| • 160-180       | High            |
| • 190 and above | Very High       |

#### HDL (Good) Cholesterol Level

- |                     |              |
|---------------------|--------------|
| • Less than 40mg/dl | Low          |
| • 40-59             | Near Optimal |
| • 60 and above      | Optimal      |

#### Total Cholesterol

- |                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| • Less than 200 | Desirable       |
| • 200-239       | Borderline High |
| • 240 and above | High            |

#### Triglycerides

- |                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| • Less than 150 | Desirable       |
| • 150-199       | Borderline High |
| • 200-499       | High            |
| • 500 and above | Very High       |

**Note:** Your doctor or healthcare provider takes your lipoprotein blood results and your risk factors into account when determining what plan of treatment would be best for you. Discuss all of this and your concerns with your doctor or health care provider.

By Barbara Mueller, RN, Faith Community Nurse  
More information can be found at: <https://mayoclinic.org>  
Click on: Patient Care & Health Info – Click on: Disease & Condition – Click on: (H) High Cholesterol  
[www.heart.org/HEARTORG](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG) Search: About Cholesterol  
**Visit:** [www.StAgnesShepherdstown.org](http://www.StAgnesShepherdstown.org) for “Lifestyle Changes” and “Alternative Medicine”

## LIFESTYLE CHANGES

A variety of things can affect cholesterol levels.

These are the things you can do something about:

- **Eat heart-healthy food.** What you eat has a direct impact on your cholesterol level.
- **Choose healthier fats.** Limit your intake of saturated fats found in red meat, processed meat, and dairy products that are not fat free. Monounsaturated fat found in olive and canola oils are healthier choices to cook with. Avocados and all kinds of nuts are sources of healthy fats.
- **Nuts.** Studies show that eating almonds, walnuts, peanuts, and other nuts is good for the heart. Eating 2 ounces a day can slightly lower LDL cholesterol levels, on the order of 5%.
- **Avoid trans fats.** The right amount of trans fats is zero! They have no nutritional value and are often found in margarines, commercially baked cookies, crackers and snack cakes.
- **Limit your dietary cholesterol.** The highest sources of cholesterol is found in organ meats, egg yolks, and whole milk products. Use lean cuts of meat and skim milk instead. Limit the intake of eggs to no more than 7 a week.
- **Select oats, barley and other whole grains.** Oats and oat bran, barley, and other whole grains can help lower your risk of heart disease, mainly by the soluble fiber they deliver.
- **Beans.** Beans are especially rich in soluble fiber. They also take awhile for the body to digest so they leave you feeling full longer after a meal. There are so many ways to prepare them.
- **Go crazy with colorful fruits and vegetables.** Fruits and vegetables are rich in dietary fiber, which can help lower cholesterol. Experiment with vegetables-based casseroles, soups, and stir-fries. Eggplants and okra are two low-calorie vegetables and a great source of fiber. Snack on seasonal fruits. Apples, grapes, strawberries, and citrus fruits are rich in pectin, a type of soluble fiber that help lower LDL cholesterol levels.
- **Eat heart-healthy fish.** Fish such as cod, tuna, and halibut have less fat, saturated fat and cholesterol than do meat and poultry. Salmon, mackerel and herring are rich in omega-3 acids.
- **Drink alcohol only in moderation.** Moderate use of alcohol may increase your levels of HDL cholesterol, but the benefits aren't strong enough to recommend alcohol for anyone who doesn't drink already. If you choose to drink do it in moderation, no more than 1 drink a day for women and 1-2 a day for men.
- **Weight management.** Losing weight if you are overweight can help lower LDL cholesterol levels and is

especially important for those with a cluster of risk factors that includes high triglyceride levels and/or low HDL cholesterol levels. Start by taking an honest look at your eating habits. Set long-term, sustainable goals.

- **Remember to count your calories.** All fats, whether good or bad, have nine calories per gram – about 100 calories a tablespoon. While you switch to a heart-healthy diet you may need to keep tabs on your calorie intake for a while.
- **Exercise regularly.** Regular exercise can help you improve your cholesterol levels. With your doctor's OK, work up to 30 to 60 minutes of exercise a day. Take a brisk walk, ride your bike, swim laps. To maintain your motivation, keep it fun.
- **Don't smoke.** If you smoke, stop. Cigarette smoking increases your risk of heart disease because it damages your blood vessels and speeds up the accumulation of plaque within the arteries.

## ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

Few natural products have been proven to reduce cholesterol, but some might be helpful. With you doctor's OK, consider these cholesterol-lowering supplements and products:

- Barley
- Beta-sitosterol (found in oral supplements and some margarines, such as Promise Activ)
- Blond psyllium (found in seed husk and products such as Metamucil)
- Oat bran (found in oatmeal and whole oats)
- Sitostanol (found in oral supplements and some margarines, such as Benecol)

Some red yeast rice products contain Monacolin K, which is chemically identical to the prescription drug lovastatin. The FDA has prohibited the sale of these products, since there's no way to determine the quantity or quality of the active ingredients.

If you choose to take cholesterol-lowering supplements remember the importance of a healthy lifestyle. If your doctor prescribes medication to reduce your cholesterol, take it as directed. Make sure your doctor knows which supplements you're taking as well.

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More information can be found at:

<https://mayoclinic.org> Click on: Patient Care & Info

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