Heart Health: Controlling Cholesterol
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Did you know that 1 in 3 Americans have high cholesterol? High cholesterol is bad news, as too much of this fat, waxy substance in the bloodstream can cause heart disease and stroke, two of the nation's leading causes of death.

A family history of heart disease puts some individuals at a higher risk for developing cholesterol problems, but other things figure into the mix, too, like smoking, obesity, and high blood pressure. The good news is that many of these factors can be controlled by improving certain aspects of your life—such as cutting out cigarettes and paying close attention to diet and exercise habits.

It's important to monitor your cholesterol. You've undoubtedly heard about the dangers of too much cholesterol, but did you know that your actually body needs some of this substance, too? It's necessary to produce cell membranes, certain hormones, and vitamin D. Cholesterol also allows other bodily functions to work properly.

Understanding Cholesterol
Our bodies obtain cholesterol two different ways: it's produced in the liver and it can be ingested by eating foods such as meat, fish, poultry, eggs, butter, and milk. Cholesterol becomes a problem, though, when *too* much of it is present in the body. Excess cholesterol doesn't simply dissolve in the bloodstream; it needs to be carried away by lipoproteins, or helpful cholesterol levels called high-density lipoproteins (HDL). When cholesterol levels increase, the "bad" cholesterol levels, or low-density lipoproteins (LDL), need to be reduced. Problems occur when LDL begin to build up, which clogs the arteries. Narrowing of the arteries then occurs, and health complications such as heart attack and stroke become a risk.

> *Cholesterol is a fat, waxy substance found in the blood-stream and in cells.*

Controlling Levels
There are several ways to fight high cholesterol. The first step is to have your doctor check your levels. If they're high, you many need to make some lifestyle adjustments. Your doctor may recommend a program that includes regulating diet and exercise. In some cases, medication may be prescribed.

Eating (Well) at Home
Eating well-balanced meals each day can sometimes be a challenge, but planning menus ahead of time and making sure you have healthy food choices on hand at home will help simplify the process of preparing meals that are good for you and your family.

- When grocery shopping, fill your cart with foods from the outside walls of the supermarket. That's where unprocessed foods such as fruits, vegetables, milk products, and whole grains are located.
- Choose foods that are low in saturated fat. Learn to read food labels to help understand what ingredients to stay away from. For information on understanding food labels, visit www.healthcastle.com/nutrition-food-label.shtml.
- Whenever possible, avoid fried foods. Choose recipes that call for broiling, roasting, or stewing instead.
- Buy skinless poultry and lean meats, or remove the skin and trim fat before cooking.
- Switch to 1% or skim milk.

Dining Out
Dates, business lunches, and social dining are all times when you don't have complete control over the menu. But you can still eat healthily at restaurants—you just need to be proactive about making good food choices.

- Check the menu for heart-healthy foods. Many restaurants include special icons next to dishes that are prepared in a health-conscious manner.
- Request sauces and salad dressings on the side. This way you control the amount of toppings added to your meals.
- Skip sodas and drink water.
- Split entrees with a friend. Some places will charge a bit more if you do this, but it's worth it—your heart will thank you!
- When ordering dessert, opt for fruit salad, yogurt, or sherbet instead of a gooey slice of chocolate cake.

Ready to take control of your cholesterol? Check out these resources and get started:

The American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org

Heart-healthy recipes
https://www.allrecipes.com/recipes/22485/healthy-recipes/heart-healthy-recipes/

Heart healthy foods check
www.checkmark.heart.org