

## SILENT, BUT DEADLY:

# 5 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CHOLESTEROL

Everyone knows you should have low cholesterol, but what is too high? And how exactly do you lower it?

**Jane Pearson, MD, Dean Preventive Cardiology, and board-certified in cholesterol management,** offers a quick and simple explanation of cholesterol, why it's important, and what you can do about it. *Here are the five things you should absolutely understand about cholesterol.*

## 1 CHOLESTEROL IS NOT JUST A PROBLEM FOR YOUR HEART.

Cholesterol occurs naturally in your body. We need a certain amount to keep cells healthy and produce certain hormones. However, when your body has more cholesterol than it needs, the excess cholesterol stays in your blood and contributes to the formation of plaque deposits in the lining of your arteries.

According to Dr. Pearson, one of two things generally happens when plaque forms. The plaque build-up can become so thick that it actually blocks the artery. Or more commonly, the plaque can cause inflammation in the artery and eventually break apart, forming a blood clot at the site of the rupture.

"If the blood clot forms in a heart artery, you may have a heart attack," she explains. "If it forms in a carotid artery, you may have a stroke. If the blood clot forms in a leg artery, you can experience significant pain or even the loss of a toe or your foot."

Any artery in your body can be affected by plaque formation.

## 2 CHOLESTEROL CAN BE A SILENT KILLER.

High cholesterol – in and of itself – produces no known symptoms. *The only way to know you have high cholesterol is to be tested, so regular screening tests are incredibly important.*

"This can really be a problem for treatment also," shares Dr. Pearson. "People don't feel sick or have any discomfort with high cholesterol. It can be difficult to motivate someone to alter their diet or lifestyle and an even more uncomfortable concept for people to take a pill for something that has no symptoms."

## 3 CHOLESTEROL IS MODIFIABLE.

"High cholesterol can cause a variety of health problems that create a tremendous amount of devastation in a person's life," reports Dr. Pearson. "The good news is that cholesterol is modifiable."

Cholesterol comes from both your genetics and your diet and lifestyle. While you can't actually change your genetics, there are a variety of medications available that can significantly lower cholesterol occurring from either source.

"I really think the most important thing is maintaining a healthy weight and lifestyle through diet and exercise," stresses Dr. Pearson.

- Moderately intense aerobic exercise, such as a brisk walk, for at least 30-40 minutes most days of the week can actually decrease your levels of "bad" cholesterol (LDL) and increase your "good" cholesterol (HDL).
- Cholesterol in your diet is primarily derived from animal fat. Limit your saturated fats by limiting the amount of red meat and dairy products that aren't non-fat or low-fat.
- Replace animal fats with high fiber foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. "I like to think of fiber as a sponge that soaks up cholesterol before it gets absorbed into your system," Dr. Pearson explains.
- The dieticians and cardiologists at Dean recommend using the Mediterranean Food Guide Pyramid as a resource for making good food decisions.

## 4 IT'S PERSONAL!

Healthcare doesn't get more individualized than this! The national guidelines for healthy cholesterol levels are based on a "risk score" for each person, taking into account a variety of proven risk factors. Your doctor will establish your own personal cholesterol goal number determined by evaluating all of your risk factors. Find out your personal goal number.

## 5 TREATMENT IS SAFE AND EFFECTIVE.

The good news is there are many safe and tremendously effective options available to help lower cholesterol once you are above your personal goal number.

"I think the statin drugs have been the biggest breakthrough in cardiology in the last 20 years," declares Dr. Pearson. "What sets them apart is in addition to lowering LDL (bad) cholesterol, they help reduce inflammation in the lining of your arteries, reducing the chances that the plaque will rupture and develop a blood clot. They actually help prevent a heart attack."

Dr. Pearson encourages people to talk to their doctors if side effects, such as muscle "aching" occur.

"By trying different dosages or different drugs, we should be able to find the right option for you with minimal side effects," she assures.

Other medications, such as ezetimibe and niacin can also be helpful. Many doctors will often use a combination of these drugs to achieve maximum impact at lower doses to minimize side effects.

Most importantly, Dr. Pearson hopes people understand that even small changes in your daily lifestyle can make a *huge* impact.

"I've always felt that preventing disease is the best way to treat it!"

*For more information about cholesterol and other health topics visit*  
**[deancare.com/crs](http://deancare.com/crs)**



### Heart Fair Off the Square

**Monday, February 11  
5:00-7:30 p.m.  
St. Mary's Hospital**

Talk one-on-one with THE heart doctors who save the most lives in Madison. Get free screenings to measure your risk for heart disease, weight-related diseases, cholesterol and blood pressure.

Taste heart-healthy food and then join in fun activities that make you move! No registration necessary. Free parking is available. For more information visit: [stmarysmadison.com](http://stmarysmadison.com)

### Let's Talk Health

#### Sharing the Secrets of Cosmetic Surgery

**Wednesday, February 27  
6 - 7 p.m.  
The Aesthetic Surgery Center  
2275 Deming Way, Middleton**

You've never asked but you've always wanted to know. Could cosmetic surgery be the answer? Join **Clifford King, MD, PhD, Ramzi Shehadi, MD, FACS** and **John Rose, Jr., MD** for a personalized discussion of ways to rejuvenate your appearance. Find out why choosing a highly-skilled surgeon is the first and most important step. Help yourself to light refreshments, take a tour of our facility and explore cost and financing options in a casual setting.

The presentation is open to all.  
Call **(608) 250-1119** to register.