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HYPERLIPIDEMIA (HIGH CHOLESTEROL)

Heart disease is the number one killer of women and men in the United States with about 500,000 people dying from heart disease each year. High blood cholesterol is one of the major risk factors for heart disease.

When there is too much cholesterol in your blood, it builds up in the walls of your arteries, thereby decreasing or blocking blood flow to the heart and other organs. High blood cholesterol itself does not cause symptoms, so many people are unaware that their cholesterol level is too high. It is important to find out what your cholesterol numbers are because lowering cholesterol levels that are too high lessens the risk for developing heart disease and reduces the chance of a heart attack or dying of heart disease, even if you already have it. Cholesterol lowering is important for everyone--younger, middle age, and older adults; women and men; and people with or without heart disease.

Everyone age 18 and older should have their cholesterol measured. This simple blood test, taken in the morning after not eating or drinking (except water) for 9 to 12 hours, gives the following information:

- Total cholesterol
- HDL (good) cholesterol--helps keep cholesterol from building up in the arteries
- LDL (bad) cholesterol--the main source of cholesterol buildup and blockage in the arteries
- Triglycerides--another form of fat in your blood

The American Heart Association endorses the National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) guidelines for detection of high cholesterol. These guidelines along with classification are listed below.

Total Cholesterol Level	Category
Less than 200 mg/dL	Desirable level that puts you at lower risk for coronary heart disease. A cholesterol level of 200 mg/dL or higher raises your risk.
200 to 239 mg/dL	Borderline high
240 mg/dL and above	High blood cholesterol. A person with this level has more than twice the risk of coronary heart disease as someone whose cholesterol is below 200 mg/dL.

HDL Cholesterol Level	Category
Less than 40 mg/dL (for men) Less than 50 mg/dL (for women)	Low HDL cholesterol. A major risk factor for heart disease.
60 mg/dL and above	High HDL cholesterol. An HDL of 60 mg/dL and above is considered protective against heart disease.

LDL Cholesterol Level	Category
Less than 100 mg/dL	Optimal
100 to 129 mg/dL	Near or above optimal
130 to 159 mg/dL	Borderline high
160 to 189 mg/dL	High
190 mg/dL and above	Very high

Triglyceride is the most common type of fat in the body. Many people who have heart disease or diabetes have high triglyceride levels. Normal triglyceride levels vary by age and sex. A high triglyceride level combined with low HDL cholesterol or high LDL cholesterol seems to speed up atherosclerosis (the buildup of fatty deposits in artery walls). Atherosclerosis increases the risk for heart attack and stroke.

Triglyceride Level	Category
Less than 150 mg/dL	Normal
150–199 mg/dL	Borderline high
200–499 mg/dL	High
500 mg/dL and above	Very high

On the whole, Americans should reduce the amount of saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and total fat in their diet. If you have high blood cholesterol, it is very important to control high blood pressure, avoid tobacco smoke, eat a healthy diet, get regular physical activity, maintain a healthy weight, and control or delay the onset of diabetes. Taking these steps will help lower your risk of heart disease and stroke. If you still need drugs to reduce your blood cholesterol, a healthy diet and active lifestyle will help lower your cholesterol and improve your overall cardiovascular health.

What Affects Cholesterol Levels?

There are modifiable risk factors (ones you can change) and non-modifiable risk factors (ones you cannot change).

Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLC) are things you can do something about:

- **Diet.** Saturated fat and cholesterol in the food you eat increases your cholesterol level. Although saturated fat is the main culprit, cholesterol in foods also matters. Reducing the amount of saturated fat and cholesterol in your diet helps lower your blood cholesterol level.
- **Weight.** Being overweight is a risk factor for heart disease. Losing weight can help lower your LDL and total cholesterol levels, as well as raise your HDL and lower your triglyceride levels.

- **Physical Activity.** Not being physically active is another risk factor for heart disease. Regular physical activity can help lower LDL (bad) cholesterol and raise HDL (good) cholesterol levels. It also helps you lose weight. Try to be physically active for 30 minutes on most, if not all, days. (Always check with you healthcare provider prior to starting a work-out regimen.)

Risk factors you can not change but that affect cholesterol levels include:

- **Age and Gender.** As women and men get older, their cholesterol levels rise. Before the age of menopause, women have lower total cholesterol levels than men of the same age. After the age of menopause, women's LDL levels tend to rise.
- **Heredity.** Your genes partly determine how much cholesterol your body makes. High blood cholesterol can run in families.

If therapeutic lifestyle changes (diet, weight loss, and increased physical activity) do not get cholesterol levels to target goal, lipid-lowering medications may be added to your overall treatment regimen.

For further discussion on diet modifications, medications, and to determine your potential risk of having a heart attack in the next 10 years, call Cornerstone Primary Healthcare at 615-824-1616 for an appointment.