

## **Cholesterol & Heart Disease**

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death among men and women, with most deaths resulting from coronary heart disease. Although women become at risk for death from coronary heart disease approximately 10 years later than men, each year more women than men die from cardiovascular disease. Although cardiovascular disease in women is known to be a major threat to life, women are still more afraid of breast cancer. The gap between the perceived and actual risk of heart disease in women may impede the adoption of effective preventive strategies.

### **What is the connection?**

Blood cholesterol level has a lot to do with your chances of getting heart disease. It is one of the major risk factors for heart disease. In fact, the higher your blood cholesterol level, the greater your risk for developing heart disease or having a heart attack. When there is too much cholesterol (a fat-like substance) in your blood, it builds up in the walls of your arteries. Over time, this buildup causes "hardening of the arteries" so that arteries become narrowed and blood flow to the heart is slowed down or blocked the result is a heart attack. 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.

### **What Do Your Cholesterol Numbers Mean?**

Everyone age 20 and older should have his or her cholesterol measured at least once every 5 years. It is best to have a blood test called a "lipoprotein profile" to find out your cholesterol numbers. This blood test is done after a 9- to 12-hour fast and gives information about your:

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

If it is not possible to get a lipoprotein profile done, knowing your total cholesterol and HDL cholesterol can give you a general idea about your cholesterol levels. If your total cholesterol is 200 mg/dL\* or more or if your HDL is less than 40 mg/dL, you will need to have a lipoprotein profile done.

Know your numbers

<b>Total Cholesterol Level</b>	<b>Category</b>
< 200 mg/dL	Desirable
200-239 mg/dL	Borderline High
≥ 240 mg/dL and above	High

\* Cholesterol levels are measured in milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per deciliter (dL) of blood.

HDL cholesterol protects against heart disease, higher numbers are better. A level less than 40 mg/dL is low and is considered a major risk factor because it increases your risk for developing heart disease. HDL levels of 60 mg/dL or more help to lower your risk for heart disease. Triglycerides can also raise heart disease risk. Levels that are borderline high (150-199 mg/dL) or high (200 mg/dL or more) may need treatment in some people.