

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

# Cholesterol

With over half of adults in England living with raised levels\*, it's time to know the facts...

**W**ant the bad news? If you haven't been affected by high cholesterol yet, it could be about to creep up on you. Women generally have lower levels than men, but between the ages of 50-65 years, our levels rise. The good news is that with lifestyle changes you can keep the condition under control. But, as most people with high cholesterol won't show any symptoms, it's essential to get tested to find out whether you're at risk.

**77%**

The number of people who say they don't understand the different types of cholesterol, according to a survey by Healthspan.

**1 in 500**

people have high cholesterol levels because of an inherited condition called familial hypercholesterolemia.

## What is cholesterol?

'Cholesterol is a waxy substance found in our blood,' says Dr Judith Holmes, who runs a private GP practice at Spire Parkway Hospital in Solihull. 'It has several important functions. However, too much of it in the blood stream can lead to an increased risk of heart attack and stroke. Common causes are poor diet, smoking, and lack of exercise.'

## When to get tested

Testing is essential if you're over 40, if you're overweight, have a family history of high cholesterol or if you have a condition related to high cholesterol. A blood sample can usually give results within 24 hours. 'Don't be scared of getting tested,' says Dr Holmes. 'You're giving yourself the opportunity to make changes and you might be reassured by your result.'

## What else can help?

- Take regular exercise. Brisk walking, swimming or cycling will help to increase levels of HLD (good) cholesterol.
- Keep your weight within the ideal range. People who are overweight are more likely to have high cholesterol levels.
- Quit smoking. Smoking reduces levels of HDL cholesterol. It also increases blood pressure and makes the blood more likely to clot.

## Eat to beat cholesterol

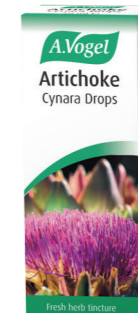
'Reduce your cholesterol by adopting a more balanced diet,' says Dr Vishal Shah, medical director at Thriva (thriva.co). 'Eat healthy fats found in nuts and olive oil, and eat less processed and fried foods, which contain harmful trans-fats. Choose wholegrain varieties of starch and eat oily fish, such as salmon, tuna or mackerel – all a great source of omega-3, which can protect your heart.'

## 3 natural solutions Ask your GP about supplements

**1 Omega-3 oils.** 'Not getting enough through your diet? Try NHP High Strength Omega 3 Support (£29.77, naturalhealthpractice.com),' says Dr Marilyn Glenville.



**2 Artichoke leaf.** Taking artichoke leaf extract can reduce LDL cholesterol by 20%. Try A. Vogel Artichoke Cynara Drops (£9.75 for 50ml, avogel.co.uk).



**3 Red yeast rice.** A natural way to lower your cholesterol. Try Source of Life Garden Red Yeast Rice (£22.95, naturusplus.co.uk).



Health  
LIVE WELL

## Know your numbers

'As a rough guide, ideally total cholesterol should be less than 5mmol/L (millimoles per litre); LDL should be less than 3mmol/L; HDL should be more than 1mmol/L,' says senior consultant cardiologist Dr Michael MacDonald. 'However, your doctor may set different targets based on your own medical history.'

## Good vs bad

Your doctor might talk about LDL (low density lipoprotein) and HDL (high density lipoprotein). 'LDL is sometimes called "bad" cholesterol,' says Dr MacDonald, 'while HDL is "good" because a raised HDL is associated with a lower risk.' LDL sticks to the walls of the blood vessels, making narrow and stiff, in the same way water pipes can become clogged with limescale.



## What about medication?

'Your GP will decide whether or not to give you statins to reduce your cholesterol after calculating your overall risk of cardiovascular disease,' says Dr MacDonald. 'This is based on factors such as blood pressure, diabetes and smoking in addition to your cholesterol level.'

WORDS: FAYE M SMITH. PHOTOS: GETTY. \*SOURCE: HEART UK THE CHOLESTEROL CHARITY