

Cholesterol

UNION AVENUE PEDIATRICS

The bodies we are given have a marvelous potential for years of happy and productive living. We keep them fit for that living with careful attention to exercise, diet, rest, and avoidance of a variety of abuses and dangers.

Cholesterol is one dietary danger, which has given our country one of the world's highest rates of death and disability from heart disease and stroke. Excess cholesterol may begin causing fatty deposits in major arteries as early as 5 years of age.

Diet is the most important cause of elevated cholesterol. Even though inheritance may contribute to high cholesterol levels, the traditional American diet of red meat, gravy, fried foods and pastries, combined with avoidance of heavy manual labor, is the principal culprit. Overweight, smoking and alcohol cause further cholesterol problems. Fortunately, recent changes in the diets of many people, regular programs of exercise, decreased numbers of smokers, and maintenance of appropriate weight, along with regular testing, have begun to decrease the deaths from heart disease and stroke.

Cholesterol can be measured beginning at 8 years of age in children with parents or grandparents, or several other family members, who have had cardiovascular disease prior to age 55, and those who have a parent with a cholesterol level greater than 240. Cholesterol levels between 170 and 199 are considered borderline and should be repeated. Since LDL (low-density lipoprotein) cholesterol and triglyceride levels are more indicative of cardiovascular risk, it is recommended that a complete cholesterol profile be obtained whenever a parent or grandparent has had cardiovascular disease before age 55, when a child's initial cholesterol level is over 200, or when the child has diabetes, smokes, or is seriously overweight.

If your child's cholesterol is elevated on the initial tests, your pediatrician can make recommendations for diet, exercise and also tell you what additional tests should be done. Your pediatrician may wish you and your child to have a conference with a dietician, and he or she may recommend a further office examination if modifications of diet, weight and exercise do not bring your child's cholesterol level into the normal range.

Exercise is part of the program we recommend for all children and adolescents, even if their cholesterol levels are normal, along with avoidance of tobacco and drugs, and maintenance of weight at the level which the child's doctor considers appropriate.

A diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol is recommended for all children and youth. A diet high in vegetables and salads, with moderate amounts of potatoes, rice, pasta and whole grain breads and cereals are good choices. Many dieticians recommend chicken, turkey and fish in equal amounts with red meat, and discourage buying fatty ground meat and sausage. You should try to buy only lean meat and to trim off as much fat as possible, use low-fat and low-cholesterol cheese, and do your frying without fat or oil. More fruit and less than customary amounts of eggs, peanut butter, chips and pastries complete a balanced diet.

More specific guidelines on cholesterol management can be found on the American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement on [Cholesterol in Childhood](#).