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David Kavesteen, MD, FACC

Dyslipidemia (high cholesterol) is a condition of abnormally elevated lipids (fat) in your blood. These elevated lipids in your blood primarily refer to high cholesterol and high triglyceride levels. At normal levels, these lipids perform important functions in your body, but when present in excess, they can pose serious health problems.

The causes of Dyslipidemia usually come from lifestyle habits, or treatable medical conditions. Obesity, lack of exercise, smoking, and eating foods high in fat and cholesterol can all contribute to high lipids in the blood. Also, conditions such as hypertension, diabetes or hypothyroidism, if untreated, can contribute to Dyslipidemia.

Basically, elevated lipids in your blood

Your Heart and Health

WHAT IS HIGH CHOLESTEROL

can speed up a process called atherosclerosis, or hardening of your arteries. Normally, your arteries are smooth and unobstructed; but in a person with excess fat in their blood, this fat may form a sticky substance called "plaque". This plaque may stick to the inner walls of your arteries and eventually harden. Overtime, with untreated excess lipid levels along with aging, this plaque may increase and cause obstruction in the arteries. As arteries narrow, less blood can flow through. Reduced blood flow increases your risk of heart disease, stroke, and vascular disease. It may also cause severe chest pain (angina), due to the lack of blood supply to the heart.

Hyperlipidemia is diagnosed by a blood test which shows the amount of lipids and triglycerides present in your blood. An LDL (bad cholesterol) level of over 160 mg/dl, and a triglyceride

level of over 150 mg/dl is considered high. People with diabetes should have levels even lower than this. There is also good cholesterol in your blood, called HDL, which should be kept over 40 mg/dl. Anything under this may also contribute to heart disease.

Just as in hypertension, hyperlipidemia may present with no symptoms, until blockage of arteries becomes severe. Fortunately, you may be able to reduce high lipid levels and, therefore, prevent or slow the progression of atherosclerosis. Lifestyle changes like exercising and eating a healthy diet can lower your lipid levels, and are often a first line treatment. There are also medications to treat this condition, when diet and exercise fail.

YOUR HEART AND HEALTH

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