Health topics
Hyperlipidaemia

Universal Care
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What is Hyperlipidaemia?

Hyperlipidaemia is also known as high cholesterol. Hyperlipidaemia is a group of conditions characterised by excessive fatty substances-cholesterol, triglycerides and phospholipids in the body. Cholesterol is a waxy fat-like substance that occurs naturally in all parts of your body. Your body needs some cholesterol to work properly but if you have too much in your blood it can stick to walls of your arteries. This is called plaque. Plaque can narrow your arteries or even block them.

What causes Hyperlipidaemia?

The condition is common and tends to occur more often in men than in women.

The causes may be due to an inherent lipid disorder or be related to other disease processes, drugs, lifestyle risk factors.

The causes may be:
- Genetic hereditary high cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Alcohol abuse
- Smoking
- Drugs e.g., diuretics, hormonal medicines i.e. oestrogens, testosterone, progesterones, beta -blockers, corticosteroids
- Kidney disease
- Hypothyroidism
- Obesity

What are the symptoms?

You may have characteristic skin lesions which occur due to collection of lipids in specific areas of the body.
- Xanthomata are lesions that may appear on tendons and also deposit in the skin
- Xanthelasma are deposits that are found in the skin around the eyes
- Arcus cornealis is a greyish ring surrounding the coloured part of the eye

There are often no signs or symptoms that you have high cholesterol, but it can be detected with a blood test. You may be likely to have high cholesterol if members of your family have it, if you are overweight or if you eat lots of fatty foods. High levels of cholesterol are a recognised risk factor for cardiovascular disease such as heart attack or stroke.

How is it diagnosed?

Hyperlipidaemia is diagnosed by means of a blood test that measures the different levels of lipids in your blood. The results of the test (lipogram), together with other factors such as smoking, obesity and exercise, are used to assess your risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

How can Hyperlipidaemia affect my health?

High cholesterol is a serious health risk because it can lead to coronary heart disease. Important risk factors for heart disease:

- High LDL cholesterol
- Low HDL cholesterol
- Age: being a man 45 years or older; being a woman 55 years or older
- Obesity
- Cigarette smoking
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Family history of heart disease (male parent or sibling under age 55; female parent or sibling under age 65)

The 'bad" cholesterol- LDL
LDL causes cholesterol to build up in the walls of arteries. This painless process can narrow or even block the artery. Reducing the blood flow through the coronary arteries, which supply blood to the heart, can lead to chest pain or if the blood flow is stopped completely, a heart attack may occur. If the same process affects the arteries supplying blood to the brain, a stroke may occur.

The "good" cholesterol -HDL
HDL helps the body get rid of excess cholesterol in the blood. Thus high HDL levels can reduce the risk of cardiovascular heart disease.

Treatment

The aim of managing your cholesterol is to reduce the "bad" cholesterol in your blood. This can be done by the following:

- Good diet- reduce intake of cholesterol and saturated fats and increase your intake of fruit, vegetables, grains, fish and lean meat
- Control other risk factors such as smoking, drinking and obesity
- Regular exercise
- Use cholesterol reducing medication such as statins, fibrates or nicotinic acid

Ideally you should try to achieve a total cholesterol reading of < 5 mmol/l and an LDL reading < 3 mmol/l. If you have existing heart disease you should try to achieve a LDL reading of < 2.5mmol/l.

Your role in managing your condition

1. Change your diet. This is the first step in lowering your cholesterol. Limit the amount of fat, especially saturated fat, in your diet. Check the labels on food and choose foods that are low in fat, preferably use foods with unsaturated fats.
2. Exercise regularly. If you are overweight this will also help you lose weight.
3. If you are a smoker, stop smoking.
4. Make sure you check your cholesterol every year.
5. If you are taking medication to lower your cholesterol, take it regularly as prescribed by your doctor.

Hyperlipidaemia is a condition in which the patient's commitment and involvement in effecting change has a great impact in the management of the condition and cardiovascular risk.