

Considering Cholesterol

The Endocrine Clinic, P.C.: Take Our Quiz to See If Your Answers Measure Up

Heart disease continues to be the No. 1 cause of death in the United States, yet many of us ***still*** are not sure about how to prevent or control it. Take this quiz, which explores the fact and fiction of heart disease, and review your answers with your doctor. The more you know about your heart health, the healthier you'll be.

1. A 50-year-old person who has smoked for more than 25 years won't see much benefit from quitting. True False
2. It's unusual to find a person with both high cholesterol and high blood pressure. True False
3. If you're over 40 and use aerobic exercise to prevent or control diabetes, in order to realize its potential benefits, you need to kick the intensity up a notch and work out more frequently than your younger counterparts. True False
4. There is no cure for high blood pressure. True False
5. All adults have the same goal for LDL-cholesterol (the "bad" one). True False
6. A heart-healthy diet should include more unsaturated fats than saturated fats. True False
7. Exercising once or twice a week is enough to promote good heart health. True False
8. Symptoms of an oncoming heart attack or stroke are always obvious; they just have to be recognized and acted on quickly. True False

1. False. It doesn't matter how long an individual has smoked. Within 24 hours of quitting, a person's chance of having a heart attack lessens. Within a year, the ex-smoker's risk for coronary heart disease is half that of a current smoker.

2. False. Nearly half (about 40%) of people with high blood pressure also have high cholesterol, and vice versa. Having these conditions together increase your chances of having coronary heart problems even more than if you had only one. If you have both conditions, you can reduce your chances of developing heart disease and stroke by regularly visiting your doctor, making healthy lifestyle choices (no smoking, proper diet, daily exercise), and faithfully taking the medications your doctors prescribes.

3. False. Studies have shown that aerobic exercise can improve the body's sensitivity to insulin, a hormone that allows cells to store and use blood glucose (sugar) for energy. In type 2 diabetes, insulin sensitivity is impaired, which contributes to high glucose levels (hyperglycemia).

4. True. While there is no actual cure for high blood pressure (also known as hypertension), there are ways to treat it and, therefore, control it. A healthy lifestyle (weight control, physical activity, proper nutrition, avoidance of excess alcohol), a consistent medication schedule, if necessary, and routine doctor's visits will help keep blood pressure in check.

5. False. Generally, LDL-cholesterol goals are based on risk factors (examples are cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, low HDL-cholesterol, family history of early heart disease, or age—in men, it's 45 years and older; in women, it's 55 years and older) and fall into three categories. If you have up to one risk factor for coronary heart disease, your LDL-cholesterol goal is less than 160mg/dL. If you have two or more risk factors, your goal is less than 130 mg/dL. But those with heart disease or an equivalent condition (such as diabetes, peripheral artery disease, abdominal aortic aneurysm, and carotid artery disease) have an LDL-cholesterol goal of less than 100 mg/dL.

6. True. Saturated fats and trans-fatty acids raise LDL-cholesterol. They're found in beef, pork, poultry with skin, and full-fat dairy products. Monounsaturated fats are much better for you. When substituted for saturated fats, they can help reduce LDL-cholesterol and triglycerides (another fat in the blood) and increase HDL-cholesterol (the "good" one). Monounsaturated fats are in many products, including canola and olive oils and avocados. The body also needs a certain amount of polyunsaturated fats in the diet. National cholesterol guidelines say that 25%–30% of your daily calories should be made up of fats—less than 7% saturated fat, up to 10% polyunsaturated fat, and up to 20% monounsaturated fat.

7. False. The American Heart Association recommends that adults participate in 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. But remember: Moderate-intensity activity doesn't mean sprinting around a football field. Brisk walking (a pace of around 3 miles per hour) is fine.

8. False. People who haven't had a physical exam or medical check-up in awhile may not know they have high cholesterol or high blood pressure until an event such as a stroke or heart attack occurs unexpectedly. There are often no symptoms, which is why these conditions are sometimes referred to as "silent killers." National guidelines suggest that all adults 20 years of age and older have their cholesterol levels checked every 5 years and their blood pressure checked every 1–2 years (more often if it's high).