

PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

HIGH CHOLESTEROL

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High cholesterol is a risk factor for heart disease. It is a form of fat derived from the food we eat that can build up in blood vessels and create plaques. Plaques are large lumps of fat which stick to the vessel wall and obstruct the flow of blood, creating increased pressure.

THE NEGATIVE EFFECT OF HIGH CHOLESTEROL

Imagine the heart is like a water pump, you push down on the pump so that water can flow out through the pipe. Similarly, your heart works to push blood through little pipes called blood vessels throughout your body. If there is too much debris and rust within the pipe, you must work harder and faster at the pump to get the same amount of water flow. In the same way, cholesterol is like debris that builds up in the vessels and obstructs blood flow, causing the heart to pump harder.

MEDICATION OPTIONS FOR HIGH CHOLESTEROL

Your doctor will take a blood sample to measure the total amount of cholesterol in your blood, ideally it should be less than 200 mg/dl. If your total cholesterol is high, that does not mean you are automatically prescribed medication! First, your doctor will calculate your risk score, which factors in all proven risks associated with heart disease. If your score is above a 7.5%, drug therapy with a statin is started. This drug is also found with many other names including Lipitor, crestor, and altoprev. Statins are the first line medication as it can both decrease bad cholesterol, and increase good cholesterol. However, it also causes side effects of muscle pain and digestive issues. As cholesterol levels are regularly monitored, your doctor may add on other medication that lowers levels in different ways, until the best fit is found.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFESTYLE CHANGES BEFORE MEDICATION

Diet, weight loss, and physical activity are the greatest weapons we have against disease! To lower cholesterol naturally, decrease consumption of red meat and full fat dairy products. Look at food labels and avoid anything with “partially hydrogenated vegetable oil” or “trans fat.” Fill your plate with high fiber foods such as oatmeal, beans, Brussel sprouts, apples and pears. Add at least thirty minutes of moderate aerobic activity to your schedule, five times a week. Physical activity and weight loss both decrease levels of bad cholesterol, and increase natural levels of good cholesterol, doubling the decrease in heart disease risk! Additionally, it is vital to quit any tobacco products. Just within a year of quitting, the risk of heart disease is cut into half.